

16

CHANGED

AT

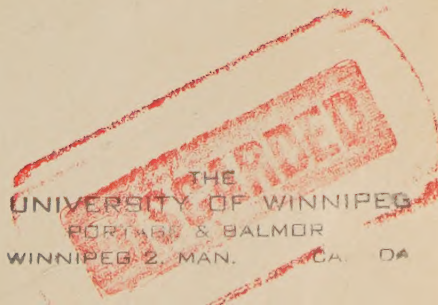
PRE

583

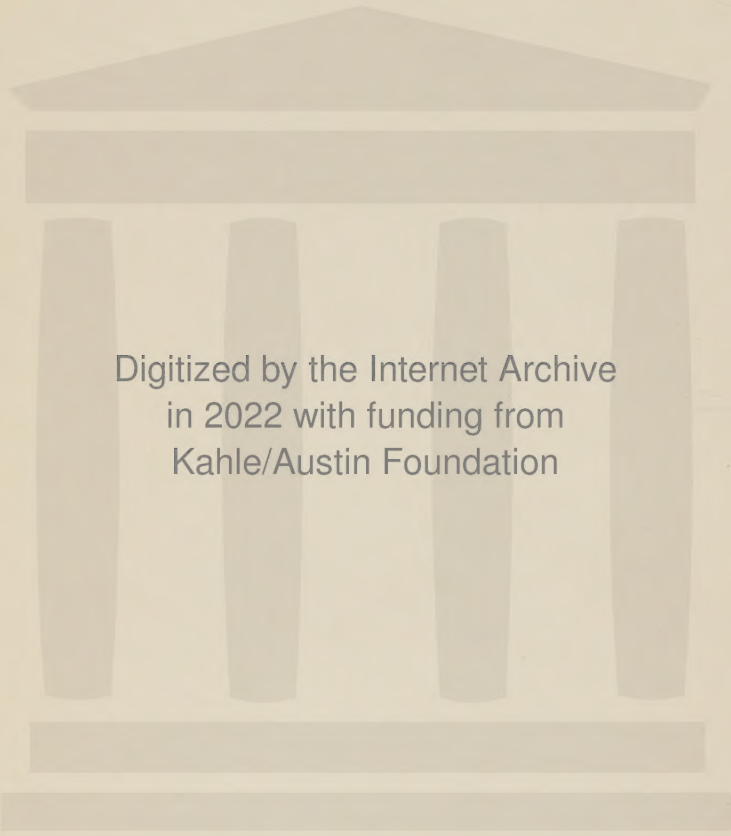
.H8

1896a

151.00



THE
UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG
PORTER & BALMOR
WINNIPEG 2, MAN. CAN. DA



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

STUDIES
IN INTERPRETATION

KEATS—CLOUGH
MATTHEW ARNOLD

BY
WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

*Professor of English Literature in the Leland
Stanford Junior University*



THE FOLCROFT PRESS, INC.
FOLCROFT, PA.

PR
583
-H8
1896a

First Published 1896

Reprinted 1969

PREFATORY NOTE.

The following essays, originally prepared as lectures, are not offered as exhaustive treatises upon the writers dealt with. They are intended to be, within the strict meaning of the title chosen for them, studies in interpretation; and detailed criticisms of a technical nature, as well as the reproduction of more or less familiar personal matters, have therefore been purposely avoided. Such value as the essays may possess will, the author believes, be found to depend upon the point of view maintained throughout—a point of view not thus far commonly adopted by students of modern poetry.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY, CALIFORNIA

JULY, 1896.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I.—JOHN KEATS	I
II.—ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH . .	75
III.—MATTHEW ARNOLD . . .	151

I.

JOHN KEATS.

STUDIES IN INTERPRETATION.

I.

JOHN KEATS.

I.

EXTENDING from 1795 to 1821, the life of John Keats, brief as it was, covered part of a period of great though somewhat pathetic interest in the history of the development of modern Europe. It may be described as the period of the ebb-flow in that tide of faith and hope which had reached its flood in the early years of the French revolution. The glorious outburst of eighty-nine had sent a thrill of new life through all the civilized nations of the world. Thought and feeling were everywhere freshened and intensified; a "conquering, new-born joy awoke," bearing with it a sense of resuscitation and power; and the doctrinaire dream of perfectibility—the dream of the Condorcets and the Godwins—seemed on

the point of realization in the domain of actual fact. Behind the race lay the broken shackles of the past, with its tyrannies, errors, superstitions; and from the present, as from a Pisgah-height, could be seen stretching away into the hazy distance the paradise of man's desire, the true land of promise of which prophets had spoken and poets sung. Well indeed might Wordsworth exclaim of those rich years of buoyancy and aspiration:

“ Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven ! O times,
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
The attraction of a country in romance !

Now was it that *both* found, the meek and lofty,
Did both find helpers to their hearts' desire,
And stuff at hand, plastic as they could wish,—
Were called upon to exercise their skill,
Not in Utopia,—subterranean fields,—
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where !
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us,—the place where, in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all ! ”¹

But the world's opportunity went by; the promise was falsified and the prediction left unfulfilled. The morning-star of the revolution sank in a sea of blood, and from the chaos of

¹ *The Prelude*, Book xi.

French tumult rose at length, not the goddess of liberty, radiant and benign, but the sinister figure of the First Consul. Thus the mind of man sank back once more into the shallows. The generous ardor cooled down; the young enthusiasm died away. Frustrated hope changed into apathy, revolutionary faith into post-revolutionary skepticism and despair.

The moral exhaustion which followed the failure of the "proud hopes" of 1789, was, as we can now see clearly enough, an inevitable reaction after the intense and abnormal strain of the great European upheaval. Of such a condition of things the literature of the time, English and continental, became the faithful mouthpiece and expression. In France especially, strong voices gave utterance to the *maladie du siècle*—the sense of the emptiness, the futility, the worthlessness of human life and effort. Senancour—best known among ourselves to-day as the Obermann of Matthew Arnold, and for Sainte-Beuve the anti-typical René, Lamartine, and Chateaubriand—the modern representative of Rousseau—may be taken, among many others, as characteristic exponents of the mood of mind thus engendered—the mood afterwards so powerfully portrayed and so remorselessly analyzed by Alfred de Musset in the opening chapter of his *Confessions d'un Enfant du Siècle*. Meanwhile, in England, though of course language and tone

were strangely unlike the language and tone of contemporary France, the spirit of a disillusioned era found a scarcely less significant interpretation. The defection of such representative men as Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, first of all from the French cause itself, and afterwards from the abstract ideas for which that cause had stood, furnished a familiar illustration of the change that had come over some of the most generous and catholic English minds in the few tempestuous years which separated the downfall of the old despotism in the person of Louis XVI., from the final establishment of the new despotism in the person of Napoleon. Southey, who had heralded the gospel of liberty in his crude but vigorous *Wat Tyler* (1794), by-and-by sought refuge in extreme conservatism, became poet laureate, and chanted the praises of George III. Coleridge, relinquishing his early visions of pantisocracy and human regeneration, and bidding farewell almost entirely to the muse, devoted such energy as he could rescue from ill-health and opium, first to literary criticism, and later to theology and metaphysics. In the meantime Wordsworth, in many respects in the present connection the most important of the great brotherhood, after gathering from Europe's wreckage of hope the mighty life-lessons of *The Prelude*, not only, like his two friends, sank gradually into the narrow insular

conceptions of political freedom then current in England, but also became so far recreant to some of the wisest principles of English social reform as to be taken by Robert Browning as "a sort of painter's model" for his *Lost Leader*.¹ "I did not," writes Southey of his own change of mental outlook and of sympathy, "fall into the error of those who having been friends of France when they imagined that the cause of liberty was implicated in her success, transferred their attachment from the republic to the military tyranny in which it ended, and regarded with complacency the cause of oppression because France was the oppressor. They had turned their faces towards the East in the morning to worship the rising sun, and in the evening they were still looking eastward, obstinately affirming that still the sun was there. I, on the contrary, altered my position as the world went round."² Thus, as Hazlitt caustically said of him, he "missed his way in Utopia," and presently "found it in Old Sarum." "Before 1793," Coleridge declares, "I clearly saw and often stated in public, the horrid delusion, the vile mockery of the whole affair. . . . I was a sharer in the general vortex, though my little world described the path of the revolution in an orbit of its own."

¹ See Browning's letter to Dr. Grosart, reprinted in G. W. Cooke's *Guide-Book to Browning*.

² Quoted in Dowden's *Southey*, p. 146.

The sublime ode to France, published originally under the significant title of *The Recantation*, contains a well-known commentary on the above words. As for Wordsworth, he has traced for us in detail in his autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, the direct influence exerted upon his thought and feeling by the rapid rush of events in France, as that country, upon which the eyes of all Europe were then anxiously fixed, ran through its cycle of action and reaction, and at length, in the pontifical benediction of the emperor, took "a lesson from the dog returning to his vomit."¹ But these statements describe what was after all in each case only a transitional stage of mental change; for loss of faith in France, for Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth alike, paved the way for a general abnegation of their early republican principles and aspirations. Meanwhile the titanic genius of Byron may be taken

¹ *The Prelude*, Book xi. Concerning the change of front of Wordsworth and Southey, see the pungent criticism of Thomas Love Peacock in his *Crochet Castle* (Chapter v.):—"He has two dear friends, Mr. Wilful Wontsee [William Wordsworth], and Mr. Rumblesack Shantsee [Robert Southey], poets of some note, who used to see visions of Utopia, and pure republics beyond the western deep; but finding that these El Dorados brought them no revenue, they turned their vision-seeing faculty into the more profitable channel of espying all sorts of virtues in the high and the mighty, who were able and willing to pay for the discovery." Compare Byron's *Don Juan*, Canto iii., Stanza 90, and the *Vision of Judgment*.

to represent the epoch's spirit of unrest, despair, cynicism, revolt. Masquerading in a dozen different disguises—as Conrad, Manfred, Cain, Lara, Childe Harold, Don Juan—he bore through Europe “the pageant of his bleeding heart”; and became a continental influence largely because, amidst all his colossal egoism, and all his real and affected flippancy and misanthropy, he expressed with such magnificent and persistent power men's sense of the ruin of their best hopes, and the consequent void in existence which neither passion nor poetry, the delights of the eye nor the pride of life, could ever wholly fill.

Yet the literature of this epoch, though mainly the expression in different forms of moral prostration, listlessness, and vacuity, had one splendid note of continued revolutionary ardor and faith. One supreme English poet of the time refused to believe that the French crisis had indeed ended in total failure, that republicanism had collapsed along with the republic, or that the reaction which had followed would prove a permanent backwater in the strong current of human progression. Endowed with keener glance and more audacious vision than his fellows, inspired with larger enthusiasms and intenser prophetic fire, intrepid in his allegiance to the truth as he had learned it, and too little of the earth earthy to appreciate, as others did, the dead weight of mundane affairs,

Shelley made it his mission to fan the low faint flame of dying hope, and to reawaken the world to the inner meaning of the baptism of blood through which it had lately passed.¹ Realizing the terrible "revulsion occasioned by the atrocities of demagogues, and the re-establishment of successive tyrannies in France," he none the less clung tenaciously to the belief that the panic of fear and horror following upon those atrocities, would gradually "give place to sanity." "Many of the most ardent and tender-hearted of the worshippers of public good," he wrote in 1817, "have been morally ruined by what a partial glimpse of the events they deplored appeared to show as the melancholy dissolution of all their cherished hopes. Hence gloom and misanthropy have become the characteristics of the age in which we live, the solace of a disappointment that unconsciously finds relief only in the wilful exaggeration of its own despair. This influence has tainted the literature of the age with the hopelessness of the minds from which it flows. Metaphysics and inquiries into moral and political science have become little else than vain attempts to revive exploded superstitions, or sophisms like those of Mr. Malthus, calculated to lull the oppressors of mankind into a

¹ The parallel between Shelley and the Swedish poet, Tegnér, in this connection, is instructive. See, *e.g.*, Boyesen's *Essays on Scandinavian Literature*, pp. 250-51.

security of everlasting triumph. Our works of fiction and poetry have been overshadowed by the same infectious gloom. But mankind appear to me to be emerging from their trance. I am aware methinks of a slow, gradual, silent change. In that belief I have composed the following poem.”¹ And by that belief, it may be added, a large part of Shelley’s finest work was inspired, from *The Revolt of Islam* itself to the closing chorus of *Hellas*—

“ The world’s great age begins anew,
The golden years return ”—

and the magnificent *Ode to the West Wind*, with its final significant question,

“ O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind ? ”

Yet almost alone among the English poets of the time, Shelley retained the warm and enduring faith in those large principles of progress of which for him the revolution itself was only a single expression. A truer utterance of the general feeling of the time may therefore be found in almost any one of his contemporaries than in this inspired prophet of Humanity, the singer of *Prometheus Unbound*.

¹ Preface to *The Revolt of Islam*.

II.

We have undertaken this necessarily superficial analysis of the larger conditions of life and thought in the years immediately following the revolution, and of the connection of the literature of the epoch with such conditions, in order that we may be the better able to appreciate the purely negative relations borne to contemporary movements by the poet with whom our present study is concerned. For us, the most significant thing about John Keats is, that living at such a time of travail, uncertainty, social dissatisfaction, and spiritual craving, his writings should nevertheless show scarcely a trace of the manifold influences at work in the world around him. The struggle and confusion, the discord, doubt, and despair of his age cast no deep shadow across the glowing pages of his verse. We go to him for no expression of the inner life of the time—for no revelation of its larger tendencies and currents. Such expression, such revelation, we seek in different ways in Byron and Shelley, in Coleridge and Wordsworth. Keats dwells apart, in the world, but scarcely of it.¹ He is pre-eminently a poet of evasion, out of touch and harmony with the things among

¹ It should be noticed in establishing the position of Keats that only one other important poet of the period remained untouched by the ideas of the revolution and the reaction which followed it. This was Samuel Rogers.

which it was his misfortune to be thrown, and seeking an escape through the imagination from the hard and sharp realities of modern life.

One of the broadest and ablest of our living critics has accentuated the important fact that in the early years of the present century "the movement party in England, and England's party of progress, remained separated by a great gulf."¹ This was, indeed, as the writer terms it, an "unfortunate circumstance"; but it was all the same an inevitable consequence of the conditions of the time. The movement party, represented by such hard-hearted, clear-sighted, unsentimental men as Bentham, Austin, and the elder Mill, had carried forward in direct line the dominant utilitarian traditions of the eighteenth century, taking, as the younger Mill himself stated, the French *philosophes* of that century as examples for their imitation. The poetry of the period, on the other hand, was, as we well know, a set protest against the entire body of those traditions, and an immediate appeal to that emotional side of life which they had systematically set at nought. Hence, for the time being, the complete alienation of philosopher and poet, and hence, moreover, the prophetic significance of the influence exercised upon the later thought of John Stuart Mill—a man nourished in younger life upon the dry Benthamite dictum that all poetry is misrepre-

¹ Edward Dowden, *Studies in Literature*, p. 33.

sentation—by the study of Wordsworth and Shelley.

Now in Keats we have the extreme reaction against the whole spirit of the eighteenth century. He was in the more general sense the most romantic among the great romanticists, because he detached himself most completely from all those elements in the life of the modern world which were the partial results of the out-workings of the forces of common sense and enlightenment. Neither Coleridge nor Wordsworth, and certainly neither Byron nor Shelley, was able to separate himself so absolutely and at every point, as did Keats, from all the widely ramifying developments of those influences which were actually at work in their midst; and therefore their romanticism, so far as its spirit and essence were concerned, was not really so thorough-going or consistent. This fact must not be lost sight of in the consideration of Keats's relation to his time.¹

¹ Attention may here be directed to the well-known lines in *Sleep and Poetry* in which, after unfolding his ideas of the true poetic spirit, Keats attacks the formal verse of the Dryden-Pope school. Himself requiring space for the full play of his exuberant and unchecked imagination, he broke down the model of couplet-structure perfected by Pope, and accepted by all Pope's successors (even so far as they employed the couplet at all, by those of the early romantic reaction). In this, as it would seem, he took the lead indicated by Leigh Hunt in his *Story of Rimini*, though he carried freedom to an excess of license which Hunt himself found it impossible to endorse (see Hunt's review of the 1817 volume, reprinted in Forman's edi-

It should be borne in mind, however, that when we undertake to describe Keats's mental attitude towards modern tendencies, practical or speculative, as an attitude of evasion, the merely negative elements in this statement are those which point towards the most significant results. This fact has indeed been anticipated in what we have already said, but it is important enough to justify a word of re-emphasis. Keats's unsympathetic contact with the modern world involved little of active protest or antagonism. If he could not enter into the spirit of his age, he did not, on the other hand, habitually set himself against it; if he was not inspired by the revolutionary fervor of Shelley, neither was he driven to expostulate with Wordsworth, or to jeer with Byron. Place Keats alongside of his characteristic antithesis among our great modern writers, Thomas Carlyle, and his position at once by contrast becomes clear. A spirit of intense revulsion from the enlightenment of the century and all its works certainly characterized poet and prophet alike; but this spirit of revulsion revealed itself in totally different ways. Carlyle faced

tion of Keats's Works, Vol. i., appendix). Keats studied Dryden's versification carefully, and with considerable advantage, before he wrote *Lamia*; and the marked contrast on the formal side between this later poem, and the "slipshod" *Endymion* is exceedingly instructive. The reader will remember Byron's unmeasured denunciation of Keats on the score of the latter's antagonism to Pope.

the ugly facts by which he found himself beset with dogged courage and unflagging energy ; he wrestled with all the most vital issues of his age ; poured out the vials of his wrath upon the new science, the new industrialism, the new democracy ; and raised his voice—the voice of one crying in the wilderness—against the shams and simulacra, the faithlessness and godliness of modern life. Keats, on the contrary, simply left these things alone. He turned his back upon a world which was thus for Carlyle the arena of a mighty spiritual conflict. The changing order of the nineteenth-century world absorbed all Carlyle's attention. By Keats it was simply ignored. The one pulled with a giant's strength against the stream of tendency. The other gathered flowers upon the bank, and carelessly let the turbid torrent roll by.

And here it should be remembered that in Keats's own view of the matter, it was no part of the poet's duty or function to assume the prophetic rôle, and undertake the guidance and leadership of men. For Carlyle, the poet was a direct emissary of God, a *vates*, a seer. "Every great poet is a teacher," wrote Wordsworth ; "I wish to be considered as a teacher or as nothing." Shelley, as might be expected, was consistent in his assertion of the poet's high responsibilities and far-reaching influence. "Poets," he declares, in the closing passage of his impassioned *Defence*, "are the hierophants

of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." With Arnold and Lowell and Browning poetry has this same vital quality, this direct bearing upon the immediate and actual things of life; while no reader is likely to forget the young Tennyson's large claim, in the poet's behalf, to divinely-given insight and power:

"The poet in a golden clime was born,
With golden stars above;
Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
The love of love.

He saw thro' life and death, thro' good and ill,
He saw thro' his own soul.
The marvel of the everlasting will
In open scroll

Before him lay."

But Keats's interpretation of his art had nothing sacerdotal or apocalyptic about it. He did not pose as a seer, nor did he ever show the slightest tendency towards the didacticism upon which Wordsworth fixed his mind. "To justify

the ways of God to men"; to throw light upon the entangled problems of human life; to sound the battle-cry of progress, firing the strong with fresh enthusiasm, and bringing the stragglers into line and step—all this was alien to his view of the gay science and its place and influence in our noisy, bustling world. Poetry for him meant relief from life's strain, sunshine lighting its darkness, music amid its harsh discord and confusion—"a thing of beauty," and, as such, "a joy forever." His highest purpose was to keep unfurled

"Love's standard on the battlements of song"—¹

his accepted ideal, the love of "the principle of beauty in all things"; the noblest conceivable result of poetry the gentle moving away, from time to time, of the pall by which our spirits are so constantly darkened. Thus he could write in remonstrance to Shelley, poet and would-be reformer—"You will, I am sure, forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity, and be more of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore." Life has "burrs and thorns" in plenty, but it is the business of poetry to set them aside, not to feed upon them. Its great end is

"that it should be a friend
To soothe the cares and lift the thoughts of man";

¹ *Endymion*, Book ii.

and that end accomplished, the poet's proper work is done. This inspiring principle of all his writing reaches something like definite formulation in *Sleep and Poetry*, and in the following passage is given perhaps its distinctest enunciation :

“ Yet I rejoice : a myrtle fairer than
E'er grew in Paphos from the bitter weeds
Lifts its sweet head into the air, and feeds
A silent space with ever-sprouting green.
All tenderest birds there find a pleasant screen,
Creep through the shade with jaunty fluttering,
Nibble the little cupped flowers, and sing.
Then let us clear away the choking thorns
From round its gentle stem ; let the young fawns,
Yeaned in after times, when we are flown,
Find a fresh sward beneath it, overgrown
With simple flowers ; let there nothing be
More boisterous than a lover's bended knee ;
Naught more ungentle than the placid look
Of one who leans upon a closed book ;
Naught more untranquil than the grassy slopes
Between two hills. All hail, delightful hopes !
As she was wont, th' imagination
Into most lovely labyrinths will be gone,
And they shall be accounted poet kings
Who simply tell the most heart-easing things.”

Recoiling thus from both the temper and the mood of modern life, Keats consciously left the obstinate questions that came up for considera-

tion, the ancient problems in their modern shapes, the party-cries, the distracting tumult of practical affairs, the fierce death-grapple of old and new in religion, morality, society, to take care of themselves; while, far from the rush and turmoil, he lingered in his fairyland of fancy, in the bower he had fashioned for himself,

“ Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.”

III.

Before passing on to inquire a little more closely into Keats's temperamental peculiarities as self-revealed in his work, we may here pause a moment to notice the obvious fact that the characteristic trend of his genius is shown in the broadest possible way both by his habitual choice of material, and by his treatment of such material when chosen. The themes of by far the greater proportion of his poems belong, it need hardly be said, to the past—to the “ beautiful tales which have come down from the ancient times of that beautiful Greece,”¹ or the literature and legend-lore of the romantic middle ages. The texture of his work is thus not woven out of the stuff furnished by his own time. All these themes are,

¹ Letter to his sister, Fanny, Sept. 10, 1817 (Forman's edition, Vol. iii., p. 78).

moreover, handled in a singularly artistic and objective spirit—a spirit at once unmodern and unyouthful. It would of course be absurd to maintain that in *Endymion*, *Lamia*, *Hyperion*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Isabella*, analysis would bring to light no trace of modern coloring, no touch of specifically modern sentiment or thought. In the romantic poems especially these qualities are often manifest even to the superficial and uncritical reader. Yet their relative absence—in other words, the creative impersonality of all these poems—must none the less be set down as remarkable, particularly when the age of the writer is taken into account. To make this point clear, one has only to contrast *La Belle Dame sans Merci* with William Morris's *Hill of Venus* in *The Earthly Paradise*. The former stands before us as a piece of well-nigh flawless artistic creation, unpervaded by modern feeling, unmarred by lyric egoism. The latter, subtly and weirdly beautiful as it is, is bathed in a "phantasmagoric golden haze" which often passes "into twilight sadness," and which, as Mr. Stedman says of the stories of *The Earthly Paradise* taken as a whole, belongs to the poet and his age, not to the old wonder-tale itself.¹

But the artistic objectivity of Keats's work is exhibited in another equally important way. In no case does the writer consciously or un-

¹ *The Nature of Poetry*, p. 131.

consciously make his poetry the vehicle for the exposition of any new theory concerning life or man. In this direction particularly the remarkable generic difference separating the work of Keats from the larger body of our modern verse, with its highly subjective character and its insistence on ulterior purposes and meanings, is very vividly brought out. On this question much might be said by way of illustration; but it will be sufficient if we here refer to the contrast presented, for example, between such poems as *Hyperion* upon the one hand, and the *Prometheus Unbound* of Shelley and the *Prometheus* of Lowell, upon the other. Shelley, distinctly repudiating any attempt "to restore the lost drama of Æschylus," and inspired, as he confesses, by the "moral intent of the fable," deliberately turns his superb drama into a choral prophecy of a regenerated world.¹ In the same way Lowell, just as distinctly enunciating his belief that every poem should contain a truth of philosophy, found himself attracted to the often-treated subject of the Titan's struggle against Zeus by reason of its modern capabilities, and thus produced a work which, in his own words, overruns "with true radicalism and anti-slavery."² It is not difficult to surmise to what new-world purposes such a story as that of the downfall of the old Satur-

¹ See his preface.

² *Letters*, Vol. i., pp. 71-73.

nian dynasty, undertaken in *Hyperion*, would have lent itself in the hands of either of the just-mentioned writers. The modern poet can, indeed, rarely borrow a subject from the life of the past without in some way breathing into it a modern spirit, even if he does not, as often happens, select it expressly for its aptness as a medium for some latter-day gospel which he may feel called upon to expound. Thus Tennyson saturates the *Idylls of the King* with the spiritual atmosphere of the nineteenth century; thus even Browning, with his strong historical sense, everywhere reveals our present tendency towards investigation, analysis, the probing for theory and solution; thus—to take only a couple of instances from minor writers—Lewis Morris tags his stories from Hades with latter-day morals, and Robert Buchanan cannot touch the legends of Pan, Proteus, and Balder without impressing upon them a significance which belongs not to their own epoch, but to ours. The method of Keats was the objective and artistic method in its purest form. He was drawn towards his material, not by reason of its real or fancied spiritual implications or bearings, but wholly and solely on account of its beauty; and so long as a story appealed to his imagination, he never stepped aside to raise any question regarding what it was intended, or could be interpreted, to prove. It is of course true that some of the legends by which

his genius was fascinated—especially the myth of Endymion—having grown up out of the moral consciousness of the race, were themselves already endowed with a certain subtle and far-reaching ideal significance. But this has nothing to do with the point now under discussion. Our thesis is simply that Keats took these stories as he found them, with or without any latent meaning, as the case might be; and that, so accepting them as they came down to him from the past, he never sought to relate them in any way to the special movements or problems of the period in which he lived.

Mr. Stedman has laid it down as a general principle that “where a work survives as an exception to the inherent temper of a people, it is likely to exhibit greatness”;¹ and he refers to the Book of Job as a remarkable illustration. It is manifest that we may extend this principle by saying that when the body of a poet’s work stands out before us as an exception to the general temper and tendencies of such poet’s era, it is certain to have unusual claims upon critical attention, since it can only have preserved its vitality and power by reason of an unusually strong endowment of original life. And the poetry of Keats may certainly be indicated as an interesting case in point.

¹ *Nature of Poetry*, p. 86.

IV.

Passing now from the consideration of these more superficial manifestations of Keats's aloofness from the general drift and spirit of his time, we need refer only in brief to certain of those more positive declarations concerning his position and point of view, which are to be found here and there in his works. It is obvious that, for the reasons already assigned, such positive declarations will be found to be at once exceedingly rare and relatively speaking meagre and unimportant. None the less they demand a moment's attention.

A foremost place among the passages now to be noted must of course be given to the familiar lines in *Lamia* which serve to sum up the poet's antagonism to the spirit of science in a kind of formulated denunciation :

“ Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy ?
There was an awful rainbow once in Heaven ;
We know her woof, her texture ; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air and gnomèd mine,
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade.”

Emphatic as these lines are in themselves, they gain strange significance from their context. At the beginning of the second part of the poem Keats has intimated that

“ Had Lycius lived to hand his story down
He might have given the moral a fresh frown ” ;

and indeed we can hardly doubt but that his own interpretation of his singular experiences would have differed very considerably from that implied in the above citation. Lycius, let us remember, is saved from being seduced by the serpent-woman into making complete shipwreck of his life only by the knowledge and wisdom of the old sage Apollonius, who at a critical moment comes to his rescue, strips off the mask of illusion, and lays bare the reality of things. This, to say the least of it, is a curious occasion to choose for an attack on science. Is knowledge to be abused if it reveals falsehood as falsehood, points out the hidden danger lurking under some fair and attractive disguise, and thus snatches us from perils wherein we should otherwise be ensnared ? To inveigh against “ philosophy ” because it will not allow us to remain in undisturbed possession of pleasant and mischievous illusions, must be described as merely childish ; yet such is certainly the only inference to be drawn from Keats’s spirited protest when read in immediate con-

nection with the story of the poem. It is evident, of course, that Keats can have had only a very imperfect realization of the larger bearings of his assertions. He thinks only of the destruction of Lamia's womanly fascination and the collapse of the romance of Lycius's life; and the logical issue of the questions arising from the incidents described, does not seem greatly to interest him. Yet we know that on other occasions he spoke with equal unguardedness and extravagance. We have Haydon's word for it that three years before the poem now referred to saw the light—and it should be remembered that this fine work was one of its author's latest and most mature productions—Keats and Lamb, while dining with him (Haydon) had agreed together that "Newton had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to the prismatic colours."¹ Along with this episode we may refer to the poet's further lamentation over the fact that the age of wonder has gone—that "the goblin is driven from the hearth and the rainbow is robbed of its mystery."²

For Keats, therefore, knowledge emphatically

¹ This is what Haydon called "the immortal dinner." The anecdote is given by the artist in his *Autobiography*, and is reproduced in Forman's edition of *Keats*, Vol. ii., pp. 36-37, *note*.

² Essay on *Kean as a Shakespearian Actor*, in Forman's edition of *Keats*, Vol. iii., p. 6.

meant disillusion. To explain the processes of nature was to remove them once for all from the soft dreamy atmosphere of poetry, through which they loomed dim but beautiful, into the lurid white glare of actuality, where they stood out gaunt, naked, angular, revolting. Thus with an emotional nature fatally out of harmony alike with the intellectual achievements and the intellectual temper of his age, he turned back upon the past, clinging with obstinate persistency to that old order of ideas, to that cosmology of marvel and mystery, which he felt to be slipping from the grasp of the world, with all that beautiful accumulation of legend and myth which in the course of ages had come to cluster about it. For him "glory and loveliness" had indeed "passed away" from a generation disenchanted by knowledge—a generation that knows not "Flora and old Pan"—a generation to which the visions of "high romance" no longer make appeal.

" Helicon !

O fountained hill ! old Homer's Helicon !
 That thou would'st spout a little streamlet o'er
 These sorry pages ; then the verse would soar
 And sing above this gentle pair, like lark
 Over his nested young : but all is dark
 Around thine agèd top, and thy clear fount
 Exhales in mists to heaven. Ay, the count
 Of mighty Poets is made up ; the scroll
 Is folded by the Muses ; the bright roll

Is in Apollo's hand : our dazèd eyes
Have seen a new tinge in the western skies :
The world has done its duty. Yet, oh yet,
Although the sun of poesy is set,
These lovers did embrace, and we must weep
That there is no old power left to steep
A quill immortal in their joyous tears."¹

But while Keats had thus to seek his inspiration in the past, his relation to the past itself was inevitably characterized by his temperamental limitations of interest and horizon. He sought in it the revelation of the beauty in which the present seemed to him to be so sadly, so grimly deficient ; to any other message borne down to him along the ages his spiritual ear was closed. For the great movements of men in history ; for the struggles, the experiments, and the failures ; for the colossal tragedies that have been played out upon the world's vast stage ; for all the manifestations of ambition and power, of courage and devotion to forlorn hopes, of faith unshaken by difficulty, and purposes unbent by danger, with which the blood-stained annals of our race are filled ;—to such things his nature made but little response. Carlyle denounced the age of science, utilitarianism, and democracy as pusillanimous and cowardly, as godless and insincere ; and he praised the past for its great men, its noble

¹ *Endymion*, Book ii.

deeds, its heroisms, its faith. Keats found modern life dull, sordid, unpoetic, ugly, and in the record of by-gone days he looked only for the romantic, the picturesque. Thus there is but slight exaggeration of his position in the familiar lines which open the second book of *Endymion* :

“O sovereign power of love ! O grief ! O balm !
 All records, saving thine, come cool and calm
 And shadowy through the mist of passèd years :
 For others, good or bad, hatred and tears
 Have become indolent ; but touching thine,
 One sigh doth echo, one poor sob doth pine,
 One kiss brings honey-dew from buried days.
 The woes of Troy, towers smothering o’er their
 blaze,
 Stiff - holden shields, far - piercing spears, keen
 blades,
 Struggling, and blood, and shrieks—all dimly fades
 Into some backward corner of the brain ;
 Yet, in our very souls, we feel amain
 The close of Troilus and Cressid sweet.
 Hence, pageant history ! hence, gilded cheat !
 Swart planet in the universe of deeds !
 Wide sea, that one continuous murmur breeds
 Along the pebbled shore of memory !
 Many old rotten-timber’d boats there be
 Upon thy vaporous bosom, magnified
 To goodly vessels ; many a sail of pride,
 And golden-keel’d, is left unlaunch’d and dry.
 But wherefore this ? What care, though owl did
 fly

About the great Athenian admiral's mast ?
What care, though striding Alexander past
The Indus with his Macedonian numbers ?
Though old Ulysses tortur'd from his slumbers
The gluttled Cyclops ? What care ? Juliet leaning
Amid her window-flowers, sighing, weaning
Tenderly her fancy from its maiden snow,
Doth more avail than these ; the silver flow
Of Hero's tears, the swoon of Imogen,
Fair Pastorella in the bandit's den,
Are things to brood on with more ardency
Than the death-day of empires."

Little allowance has to be made in reading this charming passage for the exaggeration of the mood induced by the theme upon which the poet was then at work. It would indeed be fatuous to press over closely upon words which were never meant to bear the strain of too serious an interpretation, or to attempt to deduce a solemn and definite criticism of life from the detached verses of a writer from whom it is vain to look for systematic or carefully sustained thought. There is ever a danger lest we should persist in trying Keats before a modern philosophical tribunal the jurisdiction of which he himself would have been the first to repudiate. Yet the entire body of his work appears to justify us in finding in the above-cited lines an expression of the feeling which characterised him through life. And how, in fact, should we expect Keats to manifest any

interest in certain large aspects of the life and human activity of the past when it was precisely the corresponding aspects of life and human activity as revealed under the form and fashion of his own age that he persistently turned from with unconcealed dissatisfaction and disgust?

It remains for us but to touch in this connection upon the interesting question of Keats's instinctive Platonism—an illustration of that "natural affinity" of the poet "with the Greek mind"¹ of which we shall have something more to say a little later on.

It is at this point, indeed, that we find Keats's hatred of the position and rationalistic temper of modern thought perhaps most clearly and consistently formulated. How far the transcendental principle, several times distinctly enunciated by him, is to be interpreted as the merely spontaneous outcome and expression of a personal, innate idiosyncrasy, or how far, on the other hand, it may possibly be traced back to the more or less conscious absorption of ideas from the atmosphere he breathed and the books he fed upon, it would not be easy to decide. But there are few issues of philosophical importance upon which he expressed himself with such settled conviction as upon this of the supremacy of feeling in the quest of truth.

¹ R. C. Jebb, *The Growth and Influence of Classical Greek Poetry*, p. 244.

His distrust of intellectual processes was profound; his faith in the imaginative faculty—in immediate intuition—unbounded. It was thus that he reached the large conception of things revealed in the ever-memorable lines which close the great *Ode on a Grecian Urn*:

“Cold Pastoral !

When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say’st,
‘Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty’—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

This does not mean—as is sometimes hastily inferred—that Keats deliberately placed beauty before truth, or desired to sacrifice the latter to the former. But it does mean that he held the two to be ultimately and fundamentally identical, and that for him the highest revelation of truth was to be sought under the form of beauty. Nor is this all. His Platonism carries him to the further principle that by holding fast to the beautiful we possess the final secret of the true. His one recognized road to reality was thus the primrose path of the imagination. “What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth, whether it existed before or not”—thus he states his thesis in a letter to his friend, Benjamin Bailey; adding, in striking phrase, that “Imagination may be compared to

Adam's dream—he awoke and found it true.¹” Here, as elsewhere, he put emotional apprehension before intellectual verification, and made intuition, not the logical faculty, the guide to, and ultimate criterion, of truth. So far, then, as we are able to establish anything like a philosophical basis for his thought, we find Keats in fundamental antagonism to the traditions of enlightenment and the scientific spirit of his time.

V.

We will now address ourselves to a brief consideration of one of the most important questions confronting the student of Keats's work—his general treatment of nature.

To dwell upon the large place which nature everywhere occupies in his verse would be superfluous; for him, as the most casual reader is very soon made aware, “the poetry of earth is never dead.” Nor is it necessary to exemplify or discuss at length the faithful clearness of his vision and the magical quality of many of his graphic touches. That fine felicity of turn and phrase, which can be neither missed nor explained, that genuine accent of the poetic tongue which belongs only to those who are natives to the language, are in particular to be caught everywhere in his luxuriant pictorial pas-

¹ Forman's edition of *Keats*, Vol. iii., pp. 90-91.

sages and in his occasional snatches of description. It is true that in weaving into his verse the glory and the loveliness of the external world, he often loses himself in mere opulence of detail—that, save in such instances as the *Ode to Autumn* and *Hyperion*, his transcripts habitually lack that true sense of proportion and perspective, that firm subjection of minutiae to general effect, in a word, that power of composition which mark the best workmanship of Wordsworth and Tennyson. But in the marvellous fifth stanza of the *Ode to a Nightingale*, in the splendid opening of *Hyperion*, and in such memorable phrases as

“ I who still saw the horizontal sun
Heave his broad shoulder o’er the edge o’ the
world ”¹;

and

“ The good-night blush of Eve was waning slow ”²;

and

“ Like rose leaves with the drip of summer rains ”³;

and

“ Like new flowers at morning song of bees ”⁴;

¹ *Endymion*, Book i.

² *Ibid.*, Book iv.

³ Sonnet: “ After dark vapors have oppress’d our plains.”

⁴ *Lamia*, Book ii.

to pick only a few from the countless lines that linger in the memory, we feel that in the natural magic of description Keats at his best is worthy to take a place beside Shakespeare himself.

But when from the observation of these manifest facts, and from the perusal of some of those ever fresh and charming transcripts from nature which are so freely scattered about his pages, we pass on to inquire a little more particularly into the spiritual characteristics revealed by them, we find the poet marked by the power and the limitations already noticed, —we find, in other words, that, as might have been anticipated, his attitude towards the outward world harmonizes completely with his general attitude towards life.

It should be remarked incidentally that Keats had a Greek fondness for conceiving the forces of nature under human forms of transcendent loveliness. The world of his imagination was peopled with the bright figures of nymphs and fauns, dryads and hamadryads; and the use which he makes of these differs entirely from the dry and conventional uses to which they had been put by writers of the so-called pseudo-classic school. They are so real and living to him that they do not for a moment remind us of the "supernatural machinery" about which, in discussing the epic, Bossu and Boileau, Dryden and Addison and Pope had found so much

to say. It should, moreover, be borne in mind that Keats was perhaps the first of our English poets to follow—it must be assumed unconsciously—the lead of Goethe and Schiller in connecting, after the manner of the Greeks themselves, the figures of classic mythology directly with nature and its activities, in lieu of relating them narrowly to man, as was the universal habit of poets from the renaissance downward.¹ If we had no other evidence before us beyond that furnished by the Ode to Pan in the first book of *Endymion* (the “pretty piece of paganism” which Wordsworth damned with faint praise), we should still be able to realize something of that wonderful power of spontaneous sympathy with Hellenic ways of looking at things which remains, when all is said, one of the most marvellous characteristics of Keats’s genius.

But it is with his more direct relation to nature that we are now particularly concerned; and here, once again, we observe immediately the poet’s characteristically objective spirit and the absence in his work of the peculiarly modern note. He revels with the keenest sensuous enjoyment in all the beauties of natural sights and sounds; he luxuriates in the multifarious delights of field and forest, cloud and stream; he stands breathless in the presence of the great silent mountains; his whole temperament re-

¹ Kingsley, *Essay on Alexander Smith and Alexander Pope*.

sponds to the "eternal whispers" of the sea. But of any conception of a spiritual relation with nature—of any Wordsworthian or Shelleyan feeling of a deep and intimate union between the soul of man and the soul immanent in the external universe—of anything of this kind, Keats's poetry shows hardly a trace. In the material beauty of the world—in the appeal which the bright show of things made to his highly strung and finely developed senses—he found both his sphere and his limitation. Nature for him had no spiritual message, no ethical meaning. He loved her with a passionate, all-absorbing love; but she was to him a beautiful soulless mistress, and not the solemn, veiled prophetess before whom Wordsworth offered up his vows, nor the great mysterious mother of Shelley's rapt and gorgeous visions.

No student of Wordsworth needs to be reminded of the sundry passages of deep autobiographical value in which that poet describes the changes which came over his relations with nature as his knowledge of life deepened and the "mellower years" gradually brought him "a ripper mind." In the *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, and again with more detail in the first and second books of *The Prelude*, he sets forth the three principal stages in the growth of his love for nature. First came the boyish stage of coarse animal pleasure, with its glad movements of physical vitality, its tingling

delight in the various elements which ministered to its simple, unsophisticated life. This phase of inner experience little by little gave way to a growing sense of the manifold beauty of form and color revealed to the attentive eye by the rich external world. Then, indeed, he could declare, nature was to him "all in all." Daily "the common range of visible things" grew more and more dear to him, but the early charm of incidental association weakened, and nature itself

"intervenient till this time
And secondary, now at length was sought
For her own sake."

Yet even this stage proved to be one simply of transition. He came presently, he tells us, in words too familiar to need lengthy quotation,

"To look on Nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth ; but hearing oftentimes
The still sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor greeting, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue."

In these later days of calm peacefulness and meditation, he remained consistent in his devotion to "the meadows and the woods and mountains," but the character of his feeling had been modified. It had ripened into the closest and most intimate love—a love which,

as he himself tells us, was profoundly religious in its quality. And at this time he came to realize how much his mature mind had itself brought to nature, and felt well pleased to recognize in her and in the language of his senses, as they responded to her noble and benign influence,

“ The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.”

Now, for the critic of Keats there is particular interest in the passages in which Wordsworth expounds the characteristics of the second stage of his spiritual unfolding, above touched on. Take the following lines from his *Tintern Abbey* :

“ I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion : the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite ; *a feeling and a love*
That had no need of a remoter charm
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrow'd from the eye” :

and it is obvious that the language employed, and especially the phrases which we have italicized, are throughout applicable to Keats. At

the same time we may more clearly define the attitude and feeling of our own poet by contrasting any one or more of the countless passages in which Wordsworth analyzes and dwells upon his final temper and outlook. The closing verses of his ode on *The Intimations of Immortality* may be here chosen by way of a single illustration :

“ The clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o’er man’s mortality ;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

Would Keats, had he lived, have presently passed out of the secondary stage described by Wordsworth, into one in which for him, too, the glorious show of things might have been fraught with an infinite spiritual significance? in which, to “the ear of faith” the universe might have yielded “authentic tidings” of the “central peace, subsisting at the heart of endless agitation”?¹ in which the feeling with which he “walked with nature,” might have come to partake of the character of “religious love”?² This is an interesting and important

¹ *The Excursion*, Book iv.

² *The Prelude*, Book ii.

question, but we shall find it most convenient to leave it until, in connection with a larger problem, it comes up for discussion in another part of our study.

It remains but to point out that the large body of Keats's nature-poetry is highly interesting in yet another way. It shows but little tendency towards that modern subjectivity of treatment which, since Mr. Ruskin's famous criticism, we have been in the habit of calling, not very happily it is to be feared, the "pathetic fallacy."¹ Mr. Ruskin, here as so often elsewhere, pushed his theory to quite unjustifiable extremes, and though much of his discussion is remarkably luminous and suggestive, much, on the other hand, is radically specious and confused. None the less we are thankful to him for emphasizing the difference "between the ordinary, proper, and true appearances of things to us, and their extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy." That "all violent feelings" tend "to produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things," is of course unquestionable; and that this disturbance of vision—this constant imputation of personal mood to natural phenomena, is furthermore not only a salient characteristic of the mass of our modern poetry, but is also to be considered as a direct result of

¹ *Modern Painters*, Vol. iii., Chap. xii.

certain of the sophisticating mental habits of our time, is hardly less obvious.¹ Now the point here to be noticed is that of this species of "pathetic fallacy," in its more morbid developments, the poetry of Keats as a whole is singularly free.

In poetic analogy Keats of course indulges freely, connecting natural phenomena not only with one another but also with human feelings

¹ Mr. Alfred Austin gives an admirable account of this subjective interpretation of nature in his *Fortunatus the Pessimist* (Act I, Scene iii.):

"The unmeditative primrose asks not why
It blooms then fades, nor doth the bluebell feel
The pathos of its passing ; but man comes,
And with unquiet questioning infects
The woodland with its woe. The impulsive note
Sung by yon cuckoo conscienceless, when heard
By human ear, sounds like melodious guilt,
The mocking Mephistopheles of Love.
The nightingale that bubbleth 'mong the leaves
With such sweet insolicitude it asks
No dullard night to sleep away its song,
Misread by melancholy man, bewails
A woe it understands not, thoughtless bird.
Thus staid reflection's shadow falls athwart
The cheerful seeming of the spring, and makes
May sadder than December."

Compare Mr. William Watson's *Changed Voices* and his epigram beginning "For metaphors of man we search the skies." The fine stanza in Coleridge's *Ode to Dejection* is too familiar to need more than passing reference. An interesting discussion of the whole question of the "pathetic fallacy" is given by Mr. Roden Noel in his essay on "The Poetic Interpretation of Nature" (*Wordsworthiana*, ed. by William Knight).

and experiences. The evening-star becomes for him an "amorous glow-worm of the sky";¹ sweet peas stand "on tiptoe for a flight";² the curve of a river suggests the "crescent moon";³ —and so on; and the illustrations might be indefinitely multiplied. So, too, with the other kind of analogy. The slow backward movement of a spent wave is described by him, through his own sense of lethargy, as "wayward indolence";⁴ tall oaks "dream all night without a stir";⁵ the autumn sun is seen by him "smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves";⁶ while "the moving waters" of the ocean have "their priest-like task of pure ablution"⁷ to perform. But there is manifestly a fundamental distinction between this imaginative striking out of suggestive correspondences, this subtle fusion of phenomenon and phenomenon, and such a saturation of nature with human feeling as results in the more or less complete distortion of the thing seen by the emotional medium through which it is observed. In the phrases just quoted, the poet's eye is clear and steady, and his touch certain and firm, though his imaginative insight enables him to

¹ *Ode to Psyche*.

² "I stood tiptoe upon a little hill."

³ *Endymion*, Book i.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ii.

⁵ *Hyperion*, Book i.

⁶ Sonnet: "After dark vapours."

⁷ *Ibid.*, "Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art."

discern symbols and analogies which to ordinary vision remain unrevealed. But the case is entirely altered when, in a highly self-involved mood, we concern ourselves primarily not with nature, but with ourselves, and when, having our eyes less upon the object than upon our own state, we become powerless to describe the simplest fact or scene without the imputation of purely personal coloring. It is open to us if we will to follow Keats so far as to assert, as he appears to do in a remarkable passage in the first book of *Endymion*,¹ that all natural beauty runs its roots far down into the rich sub-soil of human experience. Yet we are still bound to realize that to treat nature as the vital and immediate source of feelings which we ourselves have thrust upon her out of our own lives, is a practice to be held as morbid in origin, no matter how striking and dramatically effective it may sometimes be in its results.

Now it is to be noted, as we have said, that of this characteristic modern tendency, the poetry of Keats shows very little trace. His habit was to describe things as he saw them, without seeking to read into them the joys and sorrows of the human lot. His treatment of nature is therefore marked, to use Mr. Ruskin's

¹ See towards the close of the book, the lines—"Just so may love," etc. An interesting side-light is thrown on the general question of the anthropomorphic basis for what we call natural beauty, by Mr. Lafcadio Hearn's chapter "Of the Eternal Feminine" in his *Out of the East*.

phrase, by an "exquisite sincerity," which is doubly significant in a young modern writer as being, like the characteristics already specified, at once unmodern and unyouthful. Fresh and unsophisticated by temperamental endowment, he could take the outward world simply and frankly, as it stood revealed to him through the senses, and his strong artistic craving found ample satisfaction in its ever-renewed beauty, its ever-living charm. He desired from it no spiritual revelation, no ethical message; neither did he attempt to force it to become the plastic recipient and mouthpiece of his individual moods and fancies.

The most striking illustration of Keats's attitude towards nature, and one moreover of crucial importance, will be found in his treatment of autumn. So familiar have we all become with the mood of gentle brooding melancholy habitually associated with this season of the year—with the pensiveness that steepes all thought and feeling in a twilight beauty of its own, as the sight of reddening leaf, and patterning chestnut, and mellowing field brings to us the poignant suggestion of the evanescence of all earthly loveliness,—that we seldom pause to remind ourselves that the sadness of an October morning is fundamentally due to the projection into nature of an element directly derived from human experience. The changes of the later year belong, like the changes of the earlier, to

the regular cycle of the seasons; and if the bursting blossoms of May thrill us with a new and subtle joy, while the leafless trees of October, standing gaunt and spectral against the dull-red sunset sky, breathe into our spirits an insidious melancholy, a sense of the passing of love and hope, an evasive suggestion of sorrow so delicate as to be nearly akin to joy,—it is mainly because we look at these natural manifestations of the cosmic processes everywhere at work around us through the medium of human feeling, pervading them with a rich expansive meaning that in reality appertains to our own lives. Take the superb lines from the song in *The Princess* :

“ Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair,
Rise in the heart and gather to the eyes
In looking on the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more ”—

or take again, from the works of the same great master, the flawlessly perfect vignette in *In Memoriam*—the stanza beginning—¹

“ Calm is the morn without a sound,
Calm as to suit a calmer grief : ”

and we have autumn treated in the characteristically modern, and therefore to most of us, the sympathetic way. Or choose, for its close paral-

¹ § xi.

ielism to Keats's own ode, the finely-sustained *Autumn* of Mr. William Watson, and once more we find the poet studying the landscape and its details through a disturbing haze of sentiment arising from the heated or morbid condition of his own mind :

"Thou burden of all songs the earth hath sung,
 Thou retrospect in Time's reverted eyes,
 Thou metaphor of everything that dies,
 That dies ill-starred, or dies beloved and young
 And therefore blest and wise,—
 O, be less beautiful, or be less brief,
 Thou tragic splendour, strange and full of fear !
 In vain her pageant shall the summer rear ?
 At thy mute signal, leaf by golden leaf,
 Crumbles the gorgeous year.

.
 "For me, to dreams resign'd, there come and go,
 'Twixt mountains draped and hooded night and
 morn,
 Elusive notes in wandering wafture borne,
 From undiscoverable lips that blow
 An immaterial horn ;
 And spectral seem thy winter-boding trees,
 Their ruinous bowers and drifted foliage wet—
 O Past and Future in sad bridal met,
 O voice of everything that perishes,
 And soul of all regret."

These splendid verses are from first to last entirely subjective; they quiver with senti-

ment; they are fashioned from the stuff of human experience; the poet's eye is really more upon himself than upon the things of the outer world. Contrast, now, the interpretation of nature through the writer's mood, exemplified in the above passages, with the almost absolute aloofness of such stanzas as these:

"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
 Close bosom friend of the maturing sun;
 Conspiring with him how to load and bless
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves
 run;
 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees,
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more
 And still more, later flowers for the bees,
 Until they think warm days will never cease,
 For summer has o'erbrimm'd their clammy cells.

.

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are
 they?

Think not of them, thou hast thy music too—
 While barrèd clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
 And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue;
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river sallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft

The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft ;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies."

In these admirable lines there is but a single fallacious touch, and that of the most superficial kind—"Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn." Otherwise the description is perfect in its sheer objectivity. The following sentences from Keats's letter to Reynolds of the 22d September, 1819, should be read carefully in connection with it :

"How beautiful the season is now. How fine the air—a temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather—Dian skies. I never liked stubble-fields so much as now—aye, better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow, a stubble-plain looks warm, in the same way that some pictures look warm. This struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed it."¹

Place this passage alongside of the ode itself, to which it furnishes an admirable introduction, and the simple, direct, unsophisticated sensuousness, the characteristic naïveté of Keats's whole relation to nature, is made very clear.²

¹ Forman's edition of Keats's Works, Vol. iii., p. 329.

² Of another kind of fallacy in the handling of nature, however, the *Ode to a Nightingale* furnishes a rather striking example. A common and effective *motif* in poetry is that of contrasting the continuity of existence of what we call nature with the ephemeral life of the individual man. Ordinarily the sharp contrast thus instituted is between the cosmic totality of

VI.

We will now endeavor to bring these various aspects of Keats's genius into vital relation with one another by tracing them to their common source in the poet's peculiar temperament, as it is revealed to us throughout his verse, and even more strikingly, or at any rate more positively, in many of his letters.

Every student of German literature is familiar with Heinrich Heine's famous antithesis of the Hebrew and the Hellene. Thrown out originally for polemical purposes,¹ his theory was, things around us—Nature the vast and undying—and the tiny span of our personal career; but in the ode in question the *separate* man is set over against the *general* bird. The implied fallacy is of course the same in either case. Perhaps it would be fair to ask whether a similar sentiment would not dominate the poetry of the rose, supposing the short-lived individual flower could only put on record its feelings as it looked out on the continuous cycle of corporate human life—on Man the vast and undying. It should be remembered, however, that this species of fallacy is very far indeed from being the product of modern conditions of life and thought. It is to be found imbedded in much of the most primitive literatures, while perhaps the purest expressions ever given to it are those well-known to readers of the later classic poets, Theocritus, Bion, Moschus, Catullus. Instance the beautiful lines of the last-named writer—

“Soles occidere et redire possunt,
Nobis quum simul occidit brevis lux
Nox est perpetua una dormienda.”

¹ In his *Ludwig Börne*, 1840. An anticipation of this principle of division may be found in Schiller's suggestive essay *Ueber naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 1795-96.

that mankind as a mass is divisible into two large categories—those in whom the moral and spiritual nature is in the ascendant, and those in whom the æsthetic or artistic nature is in the ascendant. In the one group we have men “of ascetic temperaments, hostile to art, and seeking only spiritual development”; in the other group, “men filled with the warmth of life, loving display, and realistic in character.” The fundamental antagonism here presented, therefore, is between the ascetic and spiritual nature, which Heine calls Jewish, Christian, or preferably Nazarene; and the sensuous or artistic nature which he defines as Hellenic, Greek, or Pagan. The keynote of the one is spirituality, and its ideal religious culture; the keynote of the other is beauty, and its ideal æsthetic culture.

Pressed upon closely, the distinction here presented, like all such distinctions, would readily lend itself to abuse. It can never be too often or too strongly repeated that life is altogether too rich and large and Protean a thing to be packed away snugly into the cast-iron terms of any doctrinaire formula whatsoever. Particularly, of course, in the midst of a civilization so complex in its sources, and so eclectic in its character, as our own, must there be danger in the random employment of phrases pointing back to periods of culture which, after all, have been permanently out-

grown. It is well enough to indicate a man's spiritual affinities by such words as "gothic," "classic," "puritan," and the like; and by the discriminating use of such epithets we may often touch upon large and important truths. Yet we must never lose sight of the fact that the definitions thus offered can, in the nature of things, be nothing more than approximate. The narrowest and most one-sided product of modern conditions is none the less a citizen of his century, and cannot altogether denaturalize himself; his bias may be strong, yet the forces of his being will of necessity be modified and partially transformed by the multitudinous influences that play about his daily life. Thus in no precise sense can any man be described as going back to the point of view of a past century. Despite proclivity and association, character and discipline, by countless subtle and often unrecognized threads of thought and feeling the age in which he lives will hold him firmly as its own.

Nevertheless, handled with proper caution, and accepted as having reference only to broad and general characteristics, Heine's formula may be found at least suggestive. There are men whose lives are wholly dominated by the idea of morality; for whom existence is earnest, strenuous, severe—a field of ceaseless conflict and tireless exertion; who care little or nothing for beauty, as such; who look at

humanity and its problems from the religious and ethical side. Such men we may not unfairly describe as Hebrews or Nazarenes. Just so, at the opposite pole of temperament and character, there are others in whom the master-passion is the passion for beauty; by whom the world is valued only by reason of its loveliness; to whom the moral problems of the individual and the race make no appeal; whose standpoint throughout is the æsthetic standpoint. For such men the word pagan, discharged, of course, of any reproachful connotation, is no unfitting designation. Between these two extremes no real sympathy is possible. The Nazarene must needs regard the pagan as sensuous, superficial, deficient in moral earnestness; to the pagan, on the other hand, the Nazarene will not fail to appear narrow, bigoted, gloomy, ascetic. And just as of the one class we have a powerful representative in Thomas Carlyle, a true giant of the old fervent prophetic race, so of the other class we could hardly find a more interesting example than our own poet, John Keats.

We have already guarded ourselves in a general way against the misinterpretation of such a statement. Two points of a more special character must now be insisted on. In the first place, we chose the word "pagan," instead of the partially synonymous words "Hellenic" and "Greek," in order that we may hold clearly

in view the fact that we are dealing with temperament and mental outlook, and not with any questions connected with form and style. With an intuitive rapidity and certainty which, considering the limitations and disadvantages of his education, fall little short of divination, Keats assimilated the simple sensuousness, the frank, spontaneous joyousness, the devotion to beauty, the intimate good-fellowship with nature, which we have in mind when we speak of the pagan spirit; the restraint, temperance, self-repression, and austerity which characterized Hellenic art—the qualities which we emphatically call *classic*—he, on the other hand, never learned to know. The difference in this respect between his own work and the work of such thoroughly disciplined classicists as Landor and Arnold, is sufficiently marked. How curiously un-Greek, how curiously Gothic, is such a sentence as this from one of his letters to Reynolds:

“If you understand Greek, and would read me passages now and then, explaining their meaning, ’t would be, from its mistiness, perhaps a greater luxury than reading the thing itself.”¹

“From its mistiness”!—what a strange touch in such a connection! Keats’s style is, indeed, as un-Hellenic as possible—it is ultra-romantic. In his love of imaginative detail—in his florid

¹ 27 April, 1818 (Forman’s edition of *Keats*, Vol. iii., p. 146).

luxuriance, excess, extravagance, and occasional faults against proportion and good taste—in his persistent tendency not to outline only, but to paint in, to follow every thought, and pursue “conception to the very bourn of Heaven”;—in all these familiar characteristics he testifies to the direct influence of his technical models, the Elizabethans, and particularly of Spenser. It should not be forgotten that he absorbed Homer through the version of Chapman, and that thus his knowledge of Greek poetry, always second-hand knowledge, was colored deeply by the same formal medium.

In the second place, as it is almost needless to say, Keats's paganism was spontaneous and temperamental, and not at all of the reasoned or philosophic order. It was never worked out by him into, and certainly should not be regarded by us as, a methodized interpretation of life. His poetry lacks the deep Hellenic fervor, the wellnigh spiritual rapture and glow of some of the work of Swinburne, whose nature has always been keenly responsive to “the fair humanities of old religion,” and for whom, as for the true Greek, earth and sea are still the “great sweet mothers of man.” The accent of *Hertha*, *Thalassius*, *The Garden of Proserpine*, is to be caught seldom indeed in Keats's verse. Nor is this all. His paganism is not only non-philosophic and non-religious; it is also throughout of the non-militant char-

acter. His poetry has been described as "a wail and a remonstrance" over the passing away of the beautiful mythology which he loved so well; but, though we may detect something of the wail in it, of the remonstrance it contains but little. For polemical neo-paganism, for the systematic revolt of the modern man against the asceticism of Christianity, the mysticism of theology, the tyranny of church and priestcraft, we have to go to men like Swinburne and Carducci. There was little in the nature of Keats to inspire such magnificent utterances of reaction and challenge as are to be found, for instance, in the *Hymn to Man* of the one and the *Inno a Satana* of the other.¹

¹ One such positive utterance, constituting as it does an extremely instructive exception to the above general statement, should, however, be noted. In the following *Sonnet Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstitions* we have a very decided expression of Keats's total lack of sympathy with the popular forms and accompaniments of the religious feeling of his own day:

"The church bells toll a melancholy round,
 Calling the people to some other prayers,
 Some other gloominess, more dreadful cares,
 More hearkening to the sermon's horrid sound.
 Surely the mind of man is closely bound
 In some black spell; seeing that each one tears
 Himself from fireside joys, and Lydian airs,
 And converse high of these with glory crown'd.
 Still, still they toll, and I should feel a damp—
 A chill as from the tomb, did I not know
 That they are dying like an outburnt lamp;

It is our purpose, therefore, in speaking of the paganism of Keats to direct attention to the predominance in his genius of the purely æsthetic element, and the almost complete absence from it of the elements we describe as religious and ethical; to the man's high single-hearted devotion to beauty in all its sensuous manifestations; to his antique zest for life, and intimate comradeship with nature; and especially to his fine freedom from the sophistication so profoundly characteristic of our modern world. "The riddle of the painful earth," never pressed upon him for solution; and in his frank, fresh, nature there was little taint of what Carlyle called "inquisitorial metaphysics"—the *maladie du siècle*, the disease of thought. Others might find themselves driven to exhaust their energies in futile probings after theories

That 't is their sighing, wailing, ere they go
Into oblivion;—that fresh flowers will grow,
And many glories of immortal stamp."

Keats's treatment of the real church-bell here, should be contrasted with his appreciation of the romantic beauty of the vesper chime in *The Eve of St. Mark*, where it will be remembered the appeal is made to him through the imagination. For a man of Keats's temper there must necessarily have been something peculiarly harsh and repulsive about the ugly and disagreeable manifestations of the religious life common to puritanism in its modern forms of evangelicalism and dissent. It took the larger sympathy of a man like Browning (see *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*) to grasp the spiritual reality for which, in their hard, or grotesque, or distorted fashions, such things as these none the less stand,

and explanations. To Keats, life was a fact, while to most of us, it is an enigma.

Once indeed, with a firm and strong hand, he touched upon the dark problematical underside of nature, having seen her for a moment, not in her robe of matchless beauty, but as Tennyson saw her—"red in tooth and claw":

" 'T was a quiet eve,
The rocks were silent, the wide sea did weave
An untumultuous fringe of silver foam
Along the flat brown sand ; I was at home
And should have been most happy ;—*but I saw*
Too far into the sea, where every maw
The greater or the less feeds ever more.—
But I saw too distinct into the core
Of an eternal fierce destruction,
And so from happiness I was far gone.
Still am I sick of it, and tho' to-day
I've gather'd young spring leaves and flowers gay
Of periwinkle and wild strawberry,
Still do I that most fierce destruction see,—
The shark at savage prey—the hawk at pounce—
The gentle robin like a pard or ounce,
Ravening a worm"—

But, then, the thought growing too heavy for him, he breaks off with characteristic impatience—

" Away, ye horrid moods !
Moods of one's mind. You know I hate them well.
You know I'd rather be a clapping bell

In some Kamtschatkan missionary church,
Than with such horrid moods be left i' the lurch."¹

Here for a moment, then, Keats gives expression to the "horrid mood," in which the problem of nature had come between himself and the beauty of nature—the mood in which the torturing spirit of inquiry into the meaning of things had threatened to disturb his simple unquestioning enjoyment of things as he actually found them. "Do not all charms fly at the mere touch of cold philosophy?" Is not knowledge synonymous with disenchantment? wisdom with sorrow? Alas, such is the conclusion of the whole matter! Then—

" It is a flaw
In happiness to see beyond our bourn,—
It forces us in summer skies to mourn,
It spoils the singing of the nightingale."

The position here assumed is a simple one. The joy of life is jeopardized the moment thought intrudes; the loveliest fact of the world loses half its delicate charm if we allow ourselves to theorize about it. There is but one way out of our difficulty. Let us hold ourselves free from thought and theory. Beauty and romance may thus, but thus only, be still to us a possession for ever.

¹ *Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds* (1818). Compare Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*, Book ii.

Fully to appreciate the profound significance of such a conclusion, we must remember that Keats's philosophical credo, so far as it was ever formulated by him, was one of cheerless and chilling negativism. It receives its one distinct utterance in the *Sonnet Written upon the Top of Ben Nevis*, a poem which, grim enough in itself, derives added grimness from its association with his unfortunate Scottish tour.

“Read me a lesson, muse, and speak it loud
 Upon the top of Nevis, blind in mist !
 I look into the chasms, and a shroud
 Vaporous doth hide them,—just so much, I wist
 Mankind do know of Hell ; I look o’erhead,
 And there is sullen mist,—even so much
 Mankind can tell of Heaven ; mist is spread
 Before the earth beneath me,—even such,
 Even so vague is man’s sight of himself !
 Here are the craggy stones beneath my feet,—
 Thus much I know, that, a poor witless elf
 I tread on them,—that all my eye doth meet
 Is mist and crag, not only on this height,
 But in the world of thought and mental might !”

The first comment on such a poem is likely to be, that this is the philosophy of absolute negation—dark and dismal as the Scottish mist in which the verses were composed ;¹ and to

¹ For the circumstances under which this sonnet was written, see Lord Houghton’s statement in his *Life and Letters of Keats*, or in Forman’s edition of Keats’s Works, Vol. ii., p. 312, *note*.

this criticism one would hardly fail to add some expression of surprise at finding such an attitude towards life adopted by a poet whose work, as a whole, would never be connected with so joyless and uninspiring a creed. How comes it, we may well ask, that, accepting the above sonnet as a genuine expression of Keats's deepest thought concerning man's relation to himself and the universe, we none the less discover no taint of its bleak and dreary skepticism in the great body of his verse? The damp mountain-fog may indeed be taken to symbolize the intellectual principles here for once set forth; but is not the true, the characteristic atmosphere of his poetry, after all, that of the fresh and sunny valleys of the south-lands far away?¹

¹ It should be noted that Keats's work is frequently imbued with that subtle sadness which, as has been frequently pointed out (very clearly by Edgar Allan Poe amongst others), is inseparable from the apprehension of beauty in its highest manifestations. The touch of mutability upon all things earthly—the pathos inherent in the thought that life is fleeting, happiness transient, hope visionary—the solemn reminder, renewed with every day's experiences, that as mortals we move in a world of mortality, “where nothing lasts, where all that we have loved or shall love, must die” (Amiel, *Journal*, 16 Nov., 1864),—to the large and tender melancholy implied by all this, the genius of Keats was not and could not be unresponsive. For this is the true melancholy of the pagan nature, which clings the more passionately to all the world can offer of loveliness and joy from its poignant realization of the haunting fact that these things are but momentary—that beyond the sunshine there is the blank darkness, and beyond the music the great un-

Here we impinge upon a fact of cardinal importance. It is manifest that Keats's philosophical negativism touched in but slight degree, if at all, the deep wellsprings and sources of his existence. His religious creed—if on the strength of the poem now referred to, his crude and loose theorizings may be dignified by such a name—was “of his life a thing apart”; it did not permeate, saturate, modify the woof and texture of his being. The craving for spiritual satisfaction, perennial and insistent with men of a different temperament from his, he for his part rarely experienced; while the need to understand the world rationally, and to reach some explanation of its purpose and meaning, had for him nothing of an imperative character. With such matters as these, the essential forces of his character had nothing whatever to do. There

broken silence. (Compare many of Swinburne's poems; *e. g.*, *Anima Anceps*.) Such pervasive sadness is of the very essence of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, and it finds definite expression in the *Ode on Melancholy*, in the closing stanza of which the poet tells us that—

“ She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die ;
 And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
 Bidding adieu ; and aching Pleasure nigh,
 Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips :
 Ay, in the very temple of Delight
 Veiled Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
 Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
 Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine :
 His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
 And be among her cloudy trophies hung.”

were moods, indeed, in which, not the sensuous beauty, but the pain and travail of life forced themselves upon him; but these were after all but moods—"horrid moods"—to be repudiated as quickly as possible. There were seasons when he too found himself confronted by the obstinate questionings of his age; but while others brooded over them in vain search for light and satisfaction, his nature enabled him simply to throw them off. At first this habit of dismissing the harder and sharper facts of life was apparently spontaneous and unreasoned—an affair of temperament merely. But as time went on, and such facts gradually came more and more to compel attention, he began to raise this practice of evasion to the plane of a deliberate and conscious purpose, and to find in it the true secret of poetic strength and greatness.

On this subject let us allow Keats to speak for himself. Writing on the 22d December, 1817, to his brothers George and Thomas, he refers to a discussion which he had then lately had with his friend Dilke, and continues:

"At once it struck me what quality went to form a man of achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *negative capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated veri-

similitude caught from the penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.”¹

It is hardly too much to say that in this remarkable passage—the expression, it will be noted, of a purely artistic nature—Keats reveals the final secret of his relations with life. Temperamentally endowed with the power of throwing off our modern burden of doubt and difficulty, he looked out upon the world refusing to pay any heed to those intrusive questions by which its charm is broken and its gladness marred—refusing to allow his frank enjoyment of its sunshine and music to be interfered with by our everlasting and “irritable reaching after fact and reason.” His standpoint was thus as far as possible removed from that of the philosophical theorist or the ethical inquirer. These have their own angle of vision; but from the multitudinous and entangled problems which life throws upon their hands, it is at once the poet’s privilege and his duty to hold himself aloof.

“As to the poetical character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I

¹ Forman’s edition of Keats’s Works, Vol. iii., pp. 99–100. The italics are Keats’s own.

am a member, that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian, or egotistical sublime; which is a thing *per se*, and stands alone), it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—it has no character—it enjoys light and shade—it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—it has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights theameleon poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things, any more than from its taste for the bright ones, because they both end in speculation.”¹

All this simply gives us a reasoned statement of principles the roots of which, as fundamental intuitions, run deep down into the sub-soil of Keats's nature. His ideal of the poet and of the poet's attitude towards life, therefore, represents the unchecked bias of a temperament which, for him, rendered such an ideal practically possible. And it is in terms of this central fact in Keats's rare and striking personality, that the various characteristics of his genius above touched on—his power of self-detachment from circumstances by which nearly all his great contemporaries were profoundly influenced, his imaginative escape into the legendary past, his indifference to the moral aspects of existence, and to the ideas and problems of his own age,

¹ Letter to Woodhouse, Oct. 27, 1818, in Forman's edition of Keats's Works, Vol. iii., pp. 233-34.

his spontaneous sympathy with pagan habits of thought, his objective handling of nature—have one and all to find ultimate interpretation.

VII.

No study of Keats, and particularly, therefore, no such study as the foregoing, in which attention has been fixed almost exclusively upon the essential as distinguished from the technical elements of his work, can close without due recognition of the pathetic fact, that to him, as to few indeed among his compeers in genius, were denied "the years that bring the philosophic mind." It would manifestly be unsafe to speculate upon the changes that Keats's thought might have undergone had he lived to reach even middle life; but that changes would have come over him, and that such changes would have been great and far-reaching, seems absolutely certain. We know how rich and spontaneous his genius was; and we know, moreover, that his whole nature was permeated by a rare power of growth. The high, manly tone of all his self-criticism, his mingled humility and self-assertion, would alone be sufficient to show this. "My own domestic criticism," he writes to Hessey, "has given me pain without comparison beyond what 'Blackwood' or the 'Quarterly' could possibly inflict; and also when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a

glow as my own solitary reperception and ratification of what is fine. J. S. is perfectly right in regard to the 'slip-shod Endymion.' That is no fault of mine. No! though it may sound a little paradoxical, it is as good as I had power to make it by myself. Had I been nervous about its being a perfect piece, and with that view asked advice, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble. I will write independently. I have written independently *without judgment*. I may write independently, and *with judgment* hereafter. The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man. It cannot be matured by law and precept,¹ but by sensation and watchfulness in itself. . . . 'In Endymion' I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took [*sic*] tea and comfortable advice."²

And again :

"If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all. . . . If 'Endymion' serves me as a pioneer perhaps I ought to be content, for, thank God, I can read and perhaps understand Shakespeare to his depths. . . . I am anxious to get

¹ Compare Wordsworth's sonnet : "*A Poet I* He hath put his heart to school."

² Oct. 9, 1818. Forman's *Keats*, Vol. iii., pp. 230-31.

‘Endymion’ printed, that I may forget it, and proceed.”¹

In all this, as once more in the fine and dignified preface to *Endymion* itself, we have the unmistakable utterance of the true artist—of the man who will learn by trial, effort, disappointment, failure, and rise on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things. Here there is little to remind us of the mythical Keats—the poor, puny, effeminate, sensual weakling, whom Byron’s cynicism, and Haydon’s garrulity, and Shelley’s magnificent chivalry combined to keep alive in the imaginations of an uncritical public, and who started into fresh vitality under the influence of the unfortunate Fanny Brawne letters. The man who could write in this way while still in the early twenties, was surely capable of almost indefinite development; and lovers of Keats can hardly, therefore, be blamed for their belief that had he lived even to the age of Byron, he would have taken his place permanently among the greatest English poets of all time. There is thus shown a singular lack of spiritual apprehension in the brilliant lines in which Mrs. Browning speaks of the writer who, within a few brief years of a failing life, strode forward from *Endymion* to *Hyperion* and the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, as

¹ Letter to Taylor, Feb. 27, 1818, in Forman’s edition of Keats’s Works, Vol. iii., pp. 122–23.

“the man who never stepped
 In gradual progress, like another man,
 But turning grandly on his central self,
 Ensphered himself in twenty perfect years,
 And died, not young.”¹

But while we recognize this vital element of growth in Keats's genius, this supreme promise of development, this extraordinary faculty of turning failure to account, there still remains the question, more pertinent to our present purpose, as to whether or not there were indications of approaching change in the young poet's relations with life. Were there any signs that his thought of the world was likely to become larger, more serious, more sympathetic?—that the ethical note would presently have made itself heard?—that his pagan capacity for the enjoyment of sensuous beauty in all its manifold forms would by-and-by have been sobered and modified by a more persistent and a more pervasive realization of the sterner actualities of existence?

Perhaps yes—perhaps no; it is hard to meet such questions with a more definite answer than this. The fundamental quality of temperament is about the last thing in a man that any change, no matter how profound and far-reaching, is

¹ *Aurora Leigh*, Book i. Scarcely more successful is the reference in the *Vision of Poets*, wherein the lines on Keats contrast almost painfully with some of the other admirable pieces of characterization. How much truer is the touch in the early sonnet of Lowell—*To the Spirit of Keats*.

likely to affect ; and the old proverb, "once a Jacobin, always a Jacobin," if not to be accepted in the sense in which it is currently used, must be taken none the less as pointing to a very important fact. Keats was young, it is true ; but it is also true that men of spiritual instinct, of deeply religious nature, habitually pass, long before the age at which he died, through experiences to which he remained an entire stranger.¹ It may, therefore, I think, be reasonably inferred that the work of Keats's later life, stronger, purer, more temperate, more human, though it would surely have been, would still have been work upon the general lines already laid down—would still have been dominated by the same note, and have partaken of the same larger characteristics.

Yet there are passages in some of his later letters—passages, too, that cannot be interpreted as mere expressions of abnormal mental conditions resulting from ill-health and depression—which, read in connection with the *Epistle to Reynolds*, already referred to, show very clearly the gradual obsession of his mind by ideas alien to his common habits of thought and feeling. Let one such passage suffice us here. It is a lengthy one, but its value fully justifies its reproduction.

¹ We may remind ourselves at this point that the *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* were written when Wordsworth was only twenty-eight years of age.

“An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people; it takes away the heat and fever, and helps, by widening speculation, to ease ‘the burden of the mystery,’ a thing which I begin to understand a little. The difference of high sensations with and without knowledge, appears to me this: in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep, and being blown up again, without wings, and with all the horror of a bare-shouldered creature; in the former case our shoulders are fledged, and we go through the same air and space without fear. . . . I compare human life to a large mansion of many apartments, two of which I can only describe [*i.e.*, only two of which I can describe], the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we step into we call the Infant, or Thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think. We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it, but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us. We no sooner get into the second chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere. We see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there forever in delight. However, among the effects this breath-

ing is father of, is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of man, of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness and oppression, whereby this Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darkened, and at the same time, on all sides of it, many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages. We see not the balance of good and evil; we are in a mist; *we* are now in that state, we feel the 'burden of the mystery.' To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive, when he wrote *Tintern Abbey*, and it seems to me that his genius is explorative of those dark passages. Now if we live and go on thinking, we too shall explore them. . . . I may have read these things before, but I never had even a dim perception of them. . . . After all, there is certainly something real in the world."¹

No comment is needed to emphasize the significance of this remarkable passage. The question inevitably arising as we read it is: Are we not justified in believing that, as time went on, its deeper note would gradually have crept into the writer's verse?—that little by little over his bright, fresh, unsophisticated nature would have stolen something of its subduing sadness, of its strengthening and ennobling sense of reality?

¹ Letter to Reynolds, May 3, 1818; Forman's *Keats*, Vol. iii., pp. 150-55.

—that Keats was even then approaching a crisis in his spiritual development, and that the first rich output of his genius is to be held as nothing compared with the splendid fruitage that his maturer manhood would almost certainly have produced? All this must indeed remain a matter of mere speculation. "What is writ is writ," and our part is finally to accept with befitting gratitude the priceless legacy left by the dying youth to a world that cares too little for the ideal beauty to whose service his own brief life was consecrated. Yet the feeling of incompleteness, the disturbing thought of incalculable loss, will haunt us, none the less; and we cannot now close the volumes in which his memory lies embalmed forever, without a profounder realization of all that we mean when we speak of Keats as supreme among "the inheritors of unfulfilled renown."

II.

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH.

II.

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH.

I.

UPON the republication by a Boston house of a collection of poems by Alexander Smith, a young Scotchman whose work had then recently been attracting considerable attention on the other side of the Atlantic, Clough, then resident in this country, contributed a criticism of the volume to the *North American Review* for July, 1853.¹ After instituting some comparison between *A Life Drama*, the most ambitious poem in the book, and Keats's *Endymion*, the writer continued his article in this remarkable and significant strain :

“We are not sorry, in the meantime, that this *Endymion* is not upon Mount Latmos. The natural man does pant within us after *flumina silvasque* ; yet really, and truth to tell, is it not upon the whole an easy matter to sit

¹ The article was entitled, “Review of Some Poems by Alexander Smith and Matthew Arnold.” It has since been reprinted in Clough's *Prose Remains*, edited by his widow—a volume to which frequent reference will be made in the present study.

under a green tree by a purling brook and indite pleasing stanzas on the beauties of nature and fresh air? Or is it, we incline to ask, so very great an exploit to wander out into the pleasant field of Greek or Latin mythology, and reproduce, with more or less of modern adaptation,

‘the shadows

Faded and pale yet immortal, of Faunus, the
nymphs, and the graces’?

Studies of the literature of any distant age or country; all the imitations and *quasi*-translations which help to bring together into a single focus the scattered rays of human intelligence; poems after classical models, poems from Oriental sources, and the like, have undoubtedly a great literary value. Yet there is no question, it is plain and patent enough, that people much prefer *Vanity Fair* and *Bleak House*. Why so? Is it simply because we have grown prudent and prosaic, and should not welcome, as our fathers did, the Marmions and the Rokebys, the Childe Harolds and the Corsairs? or is it, that to be widely popular, to gain the ear of multitudes, to shake the hearts of men, poetry should deal, more than at present it usually does, with general wants, ordinary feelings, the obvious rather than the rare facts of human nature? Could it not attempt to convert into beauty

and thankfulness, or at least into some form and shape, some feeling, at any rate, of content—the actual, palpable things with which our every-day life is concerned; introduce into business and weary task-work a character and a soul of purpose and reality; intimate to us relations which, in our unchosen, peremptorily appointed posts, in our grievously narrow and limited spheres of action, we still, in and through all, retain to some central, celestial, fact? Could it not console us with a sense of significance, if not of dignity, in that often dirty, or at least dingy, work, which it is the lot of so many of us to have to do, and which some one or other, after all, must do? Might it not divinely condescend to all infirmities; be in all points tempted as we are; exclude nothing, least of all guilt and distress, from its wide fraternization; not content itself merely with talking of what may be better elsewhere, but seek also to deal with what *is* here? We could each one of us, alas, be so much that somehow we find we are not; we have all of us fallen away from so much that we still long to call ours. Cannot the Divine Song in some way indicate to us our unity, though from a great way off, with those happier things; inform us, and prove to us, that though we are what we are, we may yet in some way, even in our abasement, even by and through our daily work, be related to the purer existence?"

The thought running through the above passage—that poetry if it is to contend successfully against the ever-growing power of prose fiction, must concern itself more sympathetically than it habitually does with the interests and activities of the present, and cease to withdraw itself into a world of dead ideas and visionary hopes;—this thought finds further expression in one of Clough's miscellaneous poems. Appealing to the writer of verse to accept his responsibilities by becoming, in the largest sense, the illuminator and interpreter of modern life, he exclaims:

“Come, poet, come!

A thousand laborers ply their task,
 And what it tends to scarcely ask,
 And trembling thinkers on the brink
 Shiver, and know not how to think.
 To tell the purport of their pain,
 And what our silly joys contain;
 In lasting lineaments portray
 The substance of the shadowy day;
 Our real and inner deeds rehearse,
 And make our meaning clear in verse:
 Come, poet, come! for but in vain
 We do the work or feel the pain,
 And gather up the seeming gain,
 Unless before the end thou come
 To take, ere they are lost, their sum.”

It is worth while to begin our study of Clough with these characteristic citations, since

they help us to realize at once certain fundamental qualities of his genius upon which we shall here have to lay stress—his strong sense of actuality and fact; his intense appreciation of the spiritual difficulties of modern civilization; his insistence upon the poet's high place and subtle power as a leader and inspirer of men. Turning from the works of Keats to the writings of the man with whom we have now to deal, we are conscious of passing at once into a totally different emotional atmosphere. Clough is, in the most ample sense of the term, a man of his age and country. Thrown into the midst of the discord and striving, the dust and din, of our nineteenth-century world, he refuses from first to last to ignore or turn aside from the conditions by which he finds himself everywhere beset. It is not for him to seek the imaginative refuge which, each in his own way, Keats and Rossetti alike succeeded in establishing for themselves as a way of escape from the present and the real. Hideous and unattractive, complex and enigmatical as civilization may often seem to be, he will at least look its facts and its possibilities fairly and frankly in the face. With him there shall be no elusion, no evasion, no recourse to the unsubstantial dreamland of poetic utopianism. A scholar of instinct, habit, training, association, he is nevertheless prepared to abandon the "trim poetic academe" of his early life

and to step down boldly into the arena of our modern conflicts and confusions, even though "his piping" has thereby to take a "troubled sound," and his flute to lose for ever "its happy country tone."¹ And such being his relation to the world of present fact he was naturally impatient of the poetry which deliberately had forsaken the living impulses of to-day for the shadowy mythologies of yesterday or the still more shadowy promises of to-morrow—naturally prone, as we have seen, to accentuate his belief that the poet should stand forth as guide, leader, counsellor, prophet, friend, for the dumb and struggling generations of our great present-day world.

Perhaps the quality in Clough's character which of all others most impresses the sympathetic student of his work, and comes into clearer and clearer relief with every fresh inquiry into the circumstances and trials of his life, is his splendid sanity of mind—his rare intellectual clearness of vision, honesty, and unflinching courage. Edgar Allan Poe once complained of Bulwer Lytton "that he would rather sentimentalize upon a vulgar although picturesque error" than frankly accept a disagreeable and inexorable truth.² This common kind of mental cowardice was entirely foreign

¹ Matthew Arnold, *Thyrsis: A Monody to Commemorate the Author's Friend, Arthur Hugh Clough*.

² *Marginalia*, xxi.

to Clough's genius. The roots of his whole being struck firmly down into the deepest soil of fact; and to hold fast to this was for him the first and last requirement of any healthy thinking or living—a requirement to be fulfilled at any cost. Hence his acknowledged dissatisfaction with Coleridge, a teacher who, he had reason to believe, might otherwise have proved of help to him in the progress of his thought.¹ "I keep wavering," he writes, "between admiration of his exceedingly great perceptive and analytical power, and other wonderful points, and inclination to turn away altogether from a man who has so great a lack of all reality and actuality."² Keenly alive to the manifold dangers of that kind of irresponsible speculation of which the nebulous metaphysics of Coleridge furnished only too glaring an example, he himself stubbornly refused to be misled by sentimental caprice, the jugglery of so-called philosophy, or the various popular systems of theological special-pleading, into any fatal confusion of substance and shadow—of things as they are and things as we would fain have them to be. This is what Mr. R. H. Hutton must mean when he says, rather narrowly, that Clough "trusted his thoughts, not his feelings."³ How firmly and

¹ See the reference to Coleridge's "antidote power" in letter to his sister, May, 1847 (*Prose Remains*, p. 113).

² Letter to Simpkinson, Feb., 1841 (*Prose Remains*, p. 88).

³ *Clough and Amiel*, in his *Criticisms on Contemporary Thought and Thinkers*, Vol. i., p. 212.

solidly the foundations of his nature were in this way laid, is strikingly shown in the following passage from one of his American letters :

"I think I must have been getting into a little mysticism lately. It won't do : twice two are four all the world over, and there's no harm in its being so ; 't is n't the devil's doing that it is ; *il faut s'y soumettre*, and all right. Some of my companions are too much in the religiose vein to be always quite wholesome company. This climate also is, I think, mystical."¹

These sentences give us a clear declaration of Clough's intellectual position ; and if we need a commentary upon them we have only to turn to a letter dated just a month later. "What I mean by mysticism," he then writes, evidently in explanation of the foregoing remarks, "is letting feelings run on without thinking of the reality of their object, letting them out merely like water. The plain rule in all matters is, not to think of what you are thinking about the question, but to look straight out at things, and let them affect you ; otherwise how can you judge at all ? Look at them, at any rate, and judge while looking."²

We are loth to multiply quotations, yet it is so important for our present purpose that we should get as near as possible to the foundation-principles of Clough's philosophic thought that

¹ Letter of Feb. 9, 1853 (*Prose Remains*, pp. 202-3).

² Letter of March 9, 1853 (*Prose Remains*, p. 207).

space must be found for another extract dealing with the same general theme. Writing to a friend, unnamed, in March, 1852, he thus declares himself :

“As to mysticism, to go along with it even counter to fact and to reason may sometimes be tempting, though to do so would take me right away off the *terra firma* of practicable duty and business into the limbo of unrevealed things, the forbidden *terra incognita* of vague hopes and hypothetical aspirations. But when I lose my legs, I lose my head ; I am seized with spiritual vertigo and meagrimis unutterable.

“It seems His newer will
We should not think at all of Him, but turn,
And of the world that He has given us make
What best we may.¹

“ . . . Lay not your hand upon the veil of the inner sanctuary, to try and lift it up ; go, thou proselyte of the gate, and do thy service where it is permitted thee. Is it for nothing, but for the foolish souls of men to be discontented and repine and whimper at, that He made this very tolerably beautiful earth, with its logic and its arithmetic, and its exact and punctual multifarious arrangements, etc., etc., ? Is it the end and object of all finite creation that sentimental human simpletons may whine

¹ These lines with slight verbal alteration, will be found also in *Dipsychus*, Part ii., Scene 4.

about their infinite longings? Was it ordered that twice two should make four, simply for the intent that boys and girls should be cut to the heart that they do not make five? Be content, when the veil is raised, perhaps they will make five! Who knows?"¹

It would hardly be exaggerating the importance of these passages to describe them as formulating for us the central principle of Clough's intellectual life. It is not remarkable, therefore, that to the doctrine which they embody, the writer should recur again and again in his verse. Take such lines as these from the *Amours de Voyage*:

"What with trusting myself, and seeking support
from within me,
Almost I could believe I had gained a religious
assurance,
Formed in my own poor soul a great moral basis
to rest on.
Ah, but indeed I see, I feel it factitious entirely;
I refuse, reject, and put it utterly from me;
I will look straight out, see things, not try to evade
them;
Fact shall be fact for me, and the Truth the Truth
as ever,
Flexible, changeable, vague, and multiform, and
doubtful.—
Off, and depart to the void, thou subtle, fanatical
tempter"—²

¹ *Prose Remains*, pp. 180-81.

² Canto v., 5.

and it is evident that although this declaration is put dramatically into the mouth of Claude, the unheroic hero, Claude is after all here, as frequently elsewhere in the poem, the exponent of the author's own ideas. In the solemn warning of this couplet from *Dipsychus*—

“ But play no tricks upon thy soul, O man ;
Let fact be fact, and life the thing it can,”—¹

we have Clough once again insisting upon the first article of his philosophic creed—the steady acceptance of life as it actually is, with all its disappointments, difficulties, and disenchantments ; while for the remoter issues of this cardinal conviction, we have only to turn to such a passage as the following, in which through the mouth of Philip Hewson he deliberately enunciates his undeviating faith in reality :

“ Better a crust of bread, than a mountain of paper
confections,
Better a daisy in earth, than a dahlia cut and
gathered,
Better a cowslip with root, than a prize carnation
without it ” ;²

or this, in which discussing, through the utterances of another of his characters, the general relations of the good and the beautiful as they are manifested especially in womanhood, he

¹ Scene 2.

² *The Bothic of Tober-na-Vuolich*, Canto ii.

thus delivers himself of his æsthetic judgment :

“ Every woman is, or ought to be, a Cathedral,
Built on the ancient plan, a Cathedral pure and
 perfect,
Built by that only law, that Use be suggester of
 Beauty,
Nothing concealed that is done, but all things done
 to adornment,
Meanest utilities seized as occasions to grace and
 embellish.”¹

It will help us to a further appreciation of the most important constituent elements in Clough's mental make-up—his firm, unyielding grasp upon actuality, his insistence upon the sanctity of fact, his dread of mysticism, his hatred of vagueness and illusion—if we here transcribe a paragraph or two embodying his opinions concerning the eighteenth century—that century of utilitarianism and cold common-sense which it has been the habit of most post-romantic poets to discredit and abuse. Dealing with the general spirit of the age of enlightenment and reason, and with the dominant philosophy of the time, he writes :

“ Its temper was, I suppose, narrow and material ; bent upon the examination of phenomena, it admitted only such as present themselves to the lower and grosser senses ; to the notices

¹ *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*, Canto v.

of the higher and purer it peremptorily refused its attention. We cannot live without the impalpable air which we breathe, any more than without the solid earth which we tread upon ; the intimations of a spiritual world of which we cannot be rigidly, and, as it were, by all our senses, certified, constitute for our inner life an element as essential as the plain matter of fact without which nothing can be done. But it is certain also that without that matter of fact nothing can be done, and, moreover, very little can be thought : palpable things by divine right, by inevitable necessity, and intelligent ordinance, claim our habitual attention ; we are more concerned with our steps upon the ground than our inhalation of the atmosphere ; stories of the apparition of ghosts may very likely be true, but even if they are it matters extremely little.

“This austere love of truth ; this righteous abhorrence of illusion ; this rigorous, uncompromising rejection of the vague, the untestified, the merely probable ; this stern conscientious determination without paltering and prevarication to admit, *if* things are bad, that they are so ; this resolute upright purpose, as of some transcendental man of business, to go thoroughly into the accounts of the world, and make out once for all how they stand : such a spirit as this, I may say, claims more than our attention—claims our reverence.

"We must not lose it,—we must hold fast by it, precious to us as Shakespeare's intellectual or Milton's moral sublimities; while our eyes look up with them, our feet must stay themselves firmly here. Such, I believe, *is* the strong feeling of the English nation; the spirit of Newton and of Locke possesses us at least in as full measure as that of any one of their predecessors."¹

These would at any time have been courageous and wholesome words, and at the period when they were written they were especially timely and appropriate; but our concern here

¹ *Lecture on the Development of English Literature from Chaucer to Wordsworth (Prose Remains, pp. 347-48).* Contrast with this the heated denunciations of Carlyle. In connection with the above passage it is interesting to remember that Clough frankly advised one poet of his time to study the prose writers of the eighteenth century. In his review of Alexander Smith's volume, already cited, he writes: "It may be a groundless fancy, yet we do fancy, that there is a whole hemisphere, so to say, of the English language which he [Smith] has left unvisited. His diction feels to us as if between Milton and Burns he had not read, and between Shakespeare and Keats had seldom admired. Certainly there is but little inspiration in the compositions of the last century; yet English was really best and most naturally written when there was, perhaps, least to write about. To obtain a real command of the language, some familiarity with the prose writers, at any rate, of that period, is almost essential; and to write out, as a mere daily task, passages, for example, of Goldsmith, would do a verse-writer of the nineteenth century as much good, we believe, as the study of Beaumont and Fletcher" (*Prose Remains, p. 378*). It cannot be denied that there is much sound sense in this advice.

is neither with their boldness nor with their good sense, but solely with the light they throw for us upon the writer's personal character and bent of mind. There was, as we now understand, much in Clough's nature which responded spontaneously and sympathetically to the predominant temper of eighteenth-century life and thought. The "austere love of truth," the "righteous abhorrence of illusion," the stern determination to admit "if things are bad, that they are so"; all these high intellectual qualities which he above animadverts upon as claiming not only attention but reverence, are deeply rooted elements of his own nature which may well arouse similar feelings of admiration in ourselves. Mentally sane, honest, intrepid to the last degree—so his life and his words alike describe him: a clear and direct thinker; a man impatient of shams and figments of every kind; frank with himself no less than with others; intolerant of self-deception; with a temperamental horror of the vague, the mawkish, the sentimental;¹ always resolutely determined to see fact and to make the best of it;—such was

¹ Notice, for the interesting side-light which it throws upon the integrity of Clough's character, the following passage from one of his letters to his sister: "I have not read *Emilia Wyndham*, but I did read a long time ago *Two Old Men's Tales*, by the same author, and they certainly were, as I am told *Emilia Wyndham* is, too pathetic a great deal. I don't want to cry except for some good reason; it is 'pleasant but wrong' in my mind" (*Prose Remains*, pp. 112-113).

Arthur Hugh Clough—in the noblest sense of that much-abused term, a genuine seeker after truth.

But such a summary, after all,—as our last quotation taken even by itself suffices to show us—represents but one side of the man's character. He could indeed praise the eighteenth century for its cool common-sense, its hatred of illusion, its repudiation of the visionary and the mock-heroic, and the practical spirit which dictated all its efforts in philosophy, in religion, and in general life. Yet he could not but feel that the view of man and nature insisted upon by the great exponents of rationalism was necessarily partial and one-sided. Wholesome and helpful, as far as it went, and of special value as a corrective to the loose and inconsequential tendencies of current speculation, it nevertheless appeared to him to be faulty and insufficient, because it left the entire domain of the transcendental systematically out of consideration. "We cannot live without the impalpable air which we breathe, any more than without the solid earth which we tread upon; the intimations of a spiritual world of which we cannot be rigidly, and, as it were, by all our senses certified, constitute for our inner life an element as essential as the plain matter of fact without which nothing can be done." In this sentence, as we have seen, Clough enters a passing protest against the narrowness and

superficiality of that spirit of enlightenment in which he none the less found so much to arouse his sympathy and respect. But there is something more given us here than a mere criticism of eighteenth-century deficiencies and limitations. In writing these words, Clough distinctly enunciates the spiritual demands of his own nature. He confesses that for himself, at all events,—though he will have his feet always firmly planted upon the solid ground of fact—the impalpable air, the subtle atmosphere of the religious emotion, is a fundamental essential of a healthy life.

Here, then, we have to supplement our characterization of Clough's mental temper and outlook by recognition of the important qualities thus brought to our knowledge. Keen-sighted, clear-headed, candid, brave,—all this he was beyond question ; and for such a man the ability to look out steadily upon life, to relinquish old illusions when they are shown to be illusions, to bow before facts when they are proven to be facts, becomes before all else the guiding principle as well as the ultimate purpose of intellectual self-discipline. But he was at the same time endowed with the highest and most sensitive religious nature, and the spiritual cravings within him—the yearnings for something beyond the domain of experience and proof—imperatively refused to be stifled or set aside. The merely phenomenal conclusions of

positive philosophy, therefore, though he was intensely alive to their worth, afforded him no kind of permanent satisfaction; and to rest in these conclusions, as if they were final, complete, and all-comprehensive, was for him a simple impossibility. Thus he could not remain content with the simple intellectual apprehension of fact as fact. Faith for him must be rooted in reality, but reality must at the same time be interpreted in terms of faith. Frankly accepting the changing order of the world, the accumulation of knowledge, the rapid expansion of thought, as establishing the conditions of speculation to which, graciously or ungraciously, we must all of us at last submit, he none the less found himself continually haunted by an ulterior question of the first importance:—what do these things mean when looked at from the point of view of the soul? How do they stand related to the religious hopes and aspirations of the race?

And here, if we mistake not, we come upon the real secret of Clough's inner life, with its struggles and disappointments, its suspense, dubitation, and deep-seated unrest. His nature was out of balance with itself. The thinker within him led whither the poet oftentimes could not follow; the progressive intellect had left behind it the more conservative feelings. The problems that met him wherever he might turn, ultimately assumed for him a spiritual aspect; yet he found on his

hands a large mass of new knowledge which emotionally he was unable to absorb. Thus he discovered himself placed in a dilemma from which there seemed to be no way of escape. Thus he found himself haunted, in the phrase of Wordsworth, which he took as the motto for some of his own verses, by the "blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realized." He could not continue to rest his highest feelings upon what he knew to be illusions—that was out of the question; but, on the other hand, he could not find in the body of fresh ideas to which he had given his intellectual subscription, the firm foundations of a large and serene religious faith. To embark, after the fashion of sundry perplexed philosophers in these later times, upon a system of all-round compromise—to throw dust into his own eyes by adoption of the scholastic formula that a principle may be at one and the same time true in science and false in theology—to adjust the claims of the two adverse forces of his character by an adroit attempt to keep knowledge and the religious emotion entirely apart;—all this was alien to the fine integrity of his mind. And thus he remained as in a strait betwixt two; unable to turn his back upon the new thought of his age, and all its far-reaching speculative consequences; equally unable either to repudiate the religious needs of his nature, or to bring these into correspondence with the revelations of modern science,

and the rapid march of material civilization. To turn back was impossible ; but in pushing forward, and ever forward, how much after all were we compelled to leave behind !

“ Say, will it, when our hairs are gray,
 And wintry suns half light the day,
 Which cheering hope and strengthening trust
 Have left, departed, turned to dust—
 Say, will it soothe lone years to extract
 From fitful shows with sense exact
 Their sad residuum, small, of fact ?
 Will trembling nerves their solace find
 In plain conclusions of the mind ?
 Or errant fancies fond, that still
 To fretful motions prompt the will,
 Repose upon effect and cause,
 And action of unvarying laws,
 And human life’s familiar doom,
 And on the all-concluding tomb ?

“ Or were it to our kind and race,
 And our instructive selves, disgrace
 To wander then once more in you,
 Green fields, beneath the pleasant blue ;
 To dream as we were used to dream,
 And let things be whate’er they seem ?

“ O feeble shapes of beggars gray
 That, tottering on the public way,
 Die out in doting dim decay,
 Is it to you when all is past
 Our would-be wisdom turns at last ? ”²

¹ *Cold Comfort* (*Poems*, pp. 190-91).

II.

It will thus be seen that the so-called skeptical quality of Clough's poetry—the fitness of the phrase we shall consider directly—is largely the expression of a fine, honest, and richly-endowed nature thrown out of hinge within itself by contact with the intellectual conditions of modern life. Too far-sighted, alert, and sympathetic to ignore the metamorphosis which the forces of the age were working out everywhere around him, he was at the same time unable for the present to find in the new science and philosophy those religious inspirations and satisfactions without which existence for him would seem barren and meaningless, and thus he became the self-conscious exponent of conflicting tendencies which he saw he could not harmonize. It now remains for us to notice that the inbred sensitiveness of his character had been greatly intensified by the influences of his earlier life, at school and the university—influences which here demand a moment's attention.

Born in 1819, Clough was sent, soon after he had entered his eleventh year, to Rugby, then under the head-mastership of the famous Thomas Arnold. Here he remained till 1836—"a somewhat grave and studious boy, not without tastes for walking, shooting, and sight-seeing, but with little capacity for play and for mixing with others, and with more of varied in-

tellectual interest than usual with boys." ¹ The record of these important years speaks of his later achievements in football, swimming, and other athletic exercises, and of the high respect, if not exactly popularity, enjoyed by him among his schoolmates at large. But along with all this, it lays special stress on the weight of moral responsibility which the youth early felt resting upon his shoulders, and which naturally grew more burdensome as time passed on. That young Clough, with his innate conscientiousness and high strain of character, should take school-life more seriously than the rank and file of his companions, was of course inevitable; but there were two special circumstances which, at that period, helped in no small measure to strengthen the persistent bent of his mind. During these years he had no home of his own to go to in the holidays, his family being still resident in America; and the consequent lack of close and unrestrained intercourse with those nearest to him in blood and sympathy, naturally threw him back overmuch upon himself, and tended in this way to develop the habit of self-communion to which he was already only too prone. Beyond this it is clear that he responded somewhat too readily for his subsequent happiness and peace of mind, to the powerful personal influences of Dr. Arnold, who, first among modern school-

¹ *Memoir*, prefixed to *Prose Remains*, p. 10.

masters to deal with boys as morally responsible beings, carried his method to the extent of making the already over-sensitive abnormally alive to the difficulties of life and the strenuousness of duty. To one naturally so highly-strung and so intensely self-conscious as Clough, the constant strain of these early conditions could not but give rise to many unfortunate results.

That Clough himself afterwards became aware that, whatever might be said of it on general principles, the discipline of his school-life had been, in his case at any rate, far from ideally good, may be inferred from the epilogue to the first part of *Dipsychus*.¹ It must of course be remembered that the man does not here speak in his own person. The words to be quoted in evidence are put by him into the mouth of an imaginary uncle, who is made the spokesman and representative of the older school of educationalists and thinkers. But Clough evidently intended us to see how certain things would work when regarded from the angle of vision of this interesting if somewhat obstinate old person; and although we should certainly not be justified in maintaining that the views enunciated by him are meant by the

¹ Compare the following passage from the *Memoir*: "That a great strain and sense of repression were upon him at this time is clear from a letter written after the interval of twenty years. The self-reliance and self-adaptation which most men acquire in mature life were, by the circumstances of his family, forced upon him in his early youth."—*Prose Remains*, p. 11.

author to be accepted as his own, we can and must believe that they are here set down for the purpose of showing the new generation the kind of criticism that might reasonably be passed upon their aims and methods by on-lookers of an entirely different type. It was so much Clough's habit to go all round every question that he considered, that this attempt to set forth the unfavorable side of the *régime* under which he himself had been brought up, is only another illustration of the natural out-working of his character.

Here, then, is part of the conversation between uncle and nephew, the starting-point being the first part of *Dipsychus*.

"I don't very well understand what it's all about," said my uncle. "I won't say I did n't drop into a doze while the young man was drivelling through his latter soliloquies. But there was a great deal that was unmeaning, vague, and involved; and what was most plain, was least decent and least moral."

"Dear sir," said I, "says the proverb—'needs must when the devil drives'; and if the devil is to speak——"

"Well," said my uncle, "why should he? Nobody asked him. Not that he did n't say much which, if only it had n't been for the way he said it, and that it was he who said it, would have been sensible enough."

"But, sir," said I, "perhaps he was n't a devil

after all. That 's the beauty of the poem ; nobody can say. You see, dear sir, the thing which it is attempted to represent is the conflict between the tender conscience and the world. Now, the over-tender conscience will, of course, exaggerate the wickedness of the world ; and the Spirit in my poem may be merely the hypothesis or subjective imagination formed——”

“ Oh, for goodness' sake, my dear boy,” interrupted my uncle, “ don't go into the theory of it. If you 're wrong in it, it makes bad worse ; if you 're right, you may be a critic, but you can't be a poet. And then you know very well I don't understand all those new words. But as for that, I quite agree that consciences are much too tender in your generation—schoolboys' consciences, too ! As my old friend the Canon says of the Westminster students, ‘ They 're all so pious.’ It 's all Arnold's doing ; he spoilt the public schools.”

“ My dear uncle,” said I, “ how can so venerable a sexagenarian utter so juvenile a paradox ? How often have I not heard you lament the idleness and listlessness, the boorishness and vulgar tyranny, the brutish manners alike, and minds——”

“ Ah !” said my uncle, “ I may have fallen in occasionally with the talk of the day ; but at seventy one begins to see clearer into the bottom of one's mind. In middle life one says

so many things in the way of business. Not that I mean that the old schools were perfect, any more than we old boys that were there. But whatever else they were or did, they certainly were in harmony with the world, and they certainly did not disqualify the country's youth for after-life and the country's service."

"But, my dear sir, this bringing the schools of the country into harmony with public opinion is exactly——"

"Don't interrupt me with public opinion, my dear nephew; you'll quote me a leading article next. 'Young men must be young men,' as the worthy head of your college said to me touching a case of rustication. 'My dear sir,' said I, 'I only wish to heaven they would be; but as for my own nephews, they seem to me a sort of hobbadi-hoy cherub, too big to be innocent, and too simple for anything else. They're full of the notion of the world being so wicked, and of their taking a higher line, as they call it. I only fear they'll never take any line at all.' What is the true purpose of education? Simply to make plain to the young understanding the laws of the life they will have to enter. For example—that lying won't do, thieving still less; that idleness will get punished; that if they are cowards the whole world will be against them; that if they will have their own way, they must fight for it. As for the conscience, mamma, I

take it—such as mammas are now-a-days at any rate—has probably set that agoing fast enough already. What a blessing to see her good little child come back a brave young devil-may-care!”

In the perusal of these strictures it is impossible not to realize that Clough himself came to understand how much there was to be said in favor of the more robust methods of education in general vogue before his time, and how subtly his Rugby experiences had tended to develop within him those characteristics of his nature which he afterwards vainly strove to repress—excessive susceptibility, the habit of self-analysis, and a conscientiousness pushed to a morbid degree of precision. But if in this respect the peculiar conditions of his school-days had proved to be detrimental, still more harmful were the circumstances in which he found himself placed when, at the age of eighteen, he went from Rugby to Oxford. Now came indeed, as has been said, what was “essentially the turning point of his life.”¹ He entered into residence at Balliol at the time when all Oxford was shaken to its foundations by the great Tractarian movement, and when the personal power and influence of John Henry Newman were at their height. To follow the history of this extraordinary revival of mediævalism in religion—to trace phase by phase the changes

¹ *Memoir* prefixed to *Prose Remains*, p. 13.

and chances of the long stern battle waged by the Puseyite party against liberalism and the anti-dogmatic principle,¹ till such time as with the secession to Rome of its supreme leader, the aggressive band broke up, casting its relics "like driftwood on every theological or philosophical shore"²—all this, of course, would take us outside the limits of our present study. The history of the movement and its far-reaching results may be read by all those who care for the investigation of the religious developments of our time in the clear and straightforward narrative of events furnished by Dean Church, and in the vivid pages of Newman's *Apologia*, Mr. Wilfred Ward's life of his father, and Mark Pattison's *Memoirs*. Here we are concerned simply with the influences exerted by the conditions of that perilous and exciting time upon the character and thought of Clough; and it will readily be seen that such a man as we have already shown him to be, was of all men the least qualified to breathe with impunity the highly-charged and intoxicating spiritual atmosphere of the Oxford of those momentous years. While the imaginations of his contemporaries at the university were being fired as by a new faith, and their minds riven in

¹ "My battle was with liberalism; by liberalism I mean the anti-dogmatic principle and its development."—Newman's *Apologia*, p. 48.

² Goldwin Smith, *Oxford and her Colleges*, p. 82.

doubt by conflicting tendencies of almost equal potency, Clough, carried suddenly from the Rugby of Arnold to the Oxford of Newman and Ward, with the latter of whom he was soon linked by the ties of intimate friendship, was naturally drawn down into the seething current of speculation, and for a time nearly swept off his feet. The testimony of Mr. Ward himself to the disastrous consequences of the state of things thus produced, is too valuable not to be reproduced in this connection. "What was before all things to have been desired for him," Mr. Ward wrote many years after the events to which he refers, "was that during his undergraduate career he should have given himself up thoroughly to his classical and mathematical studies, and kept himself from plunging prematurely into the theological controversies then so rife at Oxford. Thus he would have been saved from all injury to the gradual and healthy growth of his mind and character. It is my own very strong impression that, had this been permitted, his future course of thought and speculation would have been essentially different from what it was in fact. Drawn, as it were, peremptorily, when a young man just coming up to college, into a decision upon questions the most important that can occupy the mind, the result was not surprising. After a premature forcing of Clough's mind, there came a reaction. His

intellectual perplexity preyed heavily upon his spirits, and grievously interfered with his studies."¹

That Clough himself from time to time realized the unfortunate influence of his Oxford surroundings, is made sufficiently clear by occasional utterances in, and no less by the general tone of, his letters dating from the period now in question. "I truly hope to escape the vortex of philosophism and discussion (whereof Ward is the centre), as it is the most exhausting exercise in the world; and I assure you I quite makarise you at Cambridge for your liberty from it."² Thus he could write to his friend, J. N. Simpkinson, in 1839. "Oxford is, as usual, replete with Newmanism and Newmanistic gossip, from which it is one blessing for you that you are preserved."³ So runs a sentence from a letter to J. P. Gell, then in Hobart Town, bearing date New Year's Day, 1840. But it was one thing to appreciate the manifold dangers of the spiritual struggle in which he had become involved, and quite another thing to turn his back decisively upon it. And so, for a time, "Clough was carried away, how far it is impossible with any approach to certainty to say, in the direction of the new opinions. He himself said afterwards

¹ Quoted in *Memoir* (*Prose Remains*, p. 14).

² *Prose Remains*, p. 85.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

that for two years he had been 'like a straw drawn up the draught of a chimney.'" ¹ By and by the reaction came, as in a nature like his, sooner or later, it was sure to come; and with the inevitable results. For "when the torrent had subsided, he found that not only had it swept away the new views which had been presented to him by the leaders of the Romanizing movement, but also that it had shaken the whole foundations of his early faith." ²

To follow from this crisis onward, the subsequent course of his religious development would be unnecessary for our present purpose; ³ nor are we called upon in this connection to enter into any discussion of the positive results of his life-long attempt towards the formulation of a philosophic creed. The above analysis was undertaken, as we premised at the outset, solely with the view of setting forth as clearly as possible certain of the conditions of the

¹ *Memoir*, p. 15.

² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³ It will be remembered that, after going through many years of trouble and perplexity about the matter, Clough at length, in 1848, found it imperatively necessary for the satisfaction of his religious scruples, and for his general peace of mind, to relinquish both his tutorship and his fellowship at the university: thus committing himself to a struggle with practical life for which, as the sequel showed, he was very inadequately prepared. The best record of his intellectual life during this period will be found in his own Oxford letters (*Prose Remains*, pp. 75-140).

man's earlier life, and of pointing out the natural influence of these upon a mind predisposed from the start to the malady of thought. With his theological opinions, as such, it will be understood, we have now no special concern.¹ It is his attitude of mind, temper, intellectual outlook, and point of view, that we want to understand—a matter quite apart from, and far more important than any inquiry into the special reasons for his acceptance or rejection of this or that particular tenet or hypothesis. It is obvious that a man's general way of looking at the deeper problems of life and conduct is in a sense a matter entirely distinct from the

¹ The fullest and clearest statement ever made by Clough himself of what may be described as the foundation-principles of his religious creed, is to be found in his brief *Notes on the Religious Tradition* (*Prose Remains*, pp. 415-21). The manuscript of this essay, though undated, "may with safety be referred to the last period of his life" (p. 415, *note*). The writer simply asserts the impossibility of holding fast to the historic records of Christianity, and takes his stand firmly upon intuition and the spiritual life of the world at large. Several important passages might be quoted from his letters in further illustration of this point of view, as, *e. g.* : "I cannot feel sure that a man may not have all that is important in Christianity even if he does not so much as know that Jesus of Nazareth existed. And I do not think that doubts respecting the facts related in the Gospels need give us much trouble. Believing that in one way or other the thing is of God, we shall in the end know, perhaps, in what way and how far it was so. Trust in God's justice and love, and belief in His commands, as written in our conscience, stand unshaken, though Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, or even St. Paul, were to fall" (*Let-*

organized body of his philosophic thought about them; and in a case like Clough's it is rather the question, *how* he envisaged the world, than the other question, *what* were his intellectual formulæ concerning it, that is the more closely allied to our own line of study and interpretation.

Yet, before we leave this part of our subject, we must turn back for a moment to a point touched upon a short time ago, and then relegated to another place for discussion. In describing the more salient qualities of Clough's character and work, we almost unconsciously make use of the term "skeptical." But how far is such an epithet, after all, justifiable? In what sense, and with what limitations, must

ter to his Sister, May, 1847, p. 113). And again: "I certainly am free to tell you that while I do fully think that the Christian religion is the best, or perhaps the only really good religion that has appeared, on the other hand, as to how it appeared, I see all possible doubt. . . . The whole origin of Christianity is lost in obscurity; if the facts are to be believed, it is simply on trust, because the religion of which they profess to be the origin is a good one. But its goodness is not proved by them; we find it out for ourselves, by the help of good people, good books, etc., etc. Such is my present feeling, and the feeling of many. . . . I mean to wait, but at present that's what I think. A great many intelligent and moral people think Christianity a bad religion. I don't, but I am not sure, as at present preached, it is quite the truth. Meanwhile, 'the kingdom of heaven cometh not of observation,' but 'is in ourselves.'" (*Letter*, of January, 1852, pp. 177-78.) Compare among Clough's poems, especially, *Epi-Strauss-ium* and *The New Sinai*.

the term be employed if it is to serve as a fair and adequate definition ?

It will help us to set ourselves right on this matter if, in the first place, we bear in mind what we have just above said about the need of distinguishing between a man's creed, be it what it may, and the spirit in which such creed is accepted by him. That there are thus many most thorough-going skeptics within the pale of the orthodox churches, and many thinkers, classed as skeptics, who are not to be described as such save by tacit consent to abandon the true meaning of our language altogether, is a proposition demanding no proof. For ourselves, then, when we speak of Clough's skepticism, we must be understood to refer to his temper, not to his system of thought—to his general relation to life, and not to his special treatment of the creeds and principles of any of the established schools of theology. It was Clough's habit to weigh and consider, to probe and analyze, to investigate and reserve judgment. His "attitude was always chiefly that of a learner"¹; and standing face to face with difficulties he would not shirk, and with perplexities which seemed to become only the more entangled the more he strove to unravel them, he was content to wait in all humbleness of spirit for the help and guidance which for the time being were withheld. The great in-

¹ *Memoir*, p. 16.

stitutes of belief handed down from the past came fraught for his judgment with no extraneous authority; they had to be tried anew at every point in the light of clear reason, with all the aids and appliances of modern knowledge, and when they were found wanting in any particular, not all the sanctity of tradition, not all the glory of historic place and power, could render them venerable in his eyes. The validity of faith, the foundations of hope, all that men have agreed to hold most sacred, were for him open questions, to be searched, and sifted, and tested calmly, rigorously, remorselessly. Accepting no dogma, recognizing no pontifical power in the domain of thought, he thus made it the purpose of his life to see things for himself; determined to follow truth whithersoever it might lead him; and equally determined, when his pathway seemed to lie only through darkness to a deeper darkness beyond, to press forward still, patient and undismayed. Let the light come, it would indeed be welcome. Let the day tarry, he would none the less bear "without resentment the divine reserve."¹

It is thus that when we dwell upon Clough's skepticism, we refer to the characteristic temper of his mind—his way of approaching the

¹ This fine phrase is from William Watson's poem, *To Edward Dowden, on Receiving from Him a Copy of the Life of Shelley*.

facts of existence, and the spirit in which he confronted the larger issues involved in them. All this of itself almost implies a further consideration which must never be lost sight of—that of the positive element always present in Clough's intellectual life. The writer of the memoir already more than once laid under contribution, is particularly earnest in insisting upon the fact that Clough's skepticism was not of the fashionable, dilettante, indifferent, or iconoclastic type. If our study of his character has been at all sufficient, there is no need now for us to lay emphasis upon this point. Nevertheless, to avoid all possibility of misapprehension, it may be well to cite a portion of what his biographer tells us of him in this connection: "His skepticism was of no mere negative quality—not a mere rejection of tradition and denial of authority, but was the expression of a pure reverence for the inner light of the spirit, and of entire submission to its guidance. It was the loyalty to truth as the supreme good of the intellect, and as the only sure foundation of moral character. . . . Such skepticism—skepticism which consists in reverent waiting for light not yet given, in respect for the truth so absolute, that nothing doubtful can be accepted as truth because it is pleasant to the soul—was his . . . to the end of his life. . . . But the skepticism which assumes a negative position from intel-

lectual pleasure in destructive arguments, which does not feel the want of spiritual support, or realize the existence of spiritual truth, which mocks at the grief of others, and refuses to accept their honest experiences as real, was never his. He never denied the reality of much that he himself could not use as spiritual nutriment. He believed that God spoke differently to different ages and to different minds.¹ Not, therefore, could he lay aside his own duty of seeking and waiting. Through good report and through evil report, this he felt to be his own personal duty, and from it he never flinched."²

III.

Such being the man, his temper, his intellectual surroundings, we pass on to a brief investigation of some of the more salient characteristics of his poetic production; merely premising that Clough's verse, as we should be led to expect from what we have learned of the personality of the writer, will everywhere be found to present itself to the student as a singularly transparent medium of self-revelation. It belongs throughout to the poetry that we classify as intellectual, rather than passionate or imaginative; bears

¹ Compare Clough's own statement in regard to this in *Notes on the Religious Tradition* (*Prose Remains*, pp. 418-20).

² *Memoir*, pp. 15-17.

along with it upon its simplest phrases the heaviest burden of thought and speculation, and nowhere seeks those lighter graces of the muse which are best calculated to appeal to popular taste. The larger portion of it is purely subjective and personal; and the remaining parts—even the stories of the unfinished *Mari Magno*—are intended as serious contributions towards the study of what the writer always regarded as life's most important themes. Clough himself had little or no interest in poetry "which did not touch some deep question, some vital feeling in human nature"¹; and his own verse is likely to prove acceptable only to readers who, with him, would habitually turn to the poet, not for splendor of language, opulence of imagery, felicity of fancy, or charm of style, but for earnest criticism of the ever-encroaching spiritual and social problems of the time.

In the first place, then, it may be pointed out in passing that Clough's poetry as a whole is naturally marked by a persistent sense of impermanence, instability, and transition—by the forward-reaching spirit of a man who, himself falling upon an epoch of upheaval, experiment, and widespread intellectual unrest, stands tip-toe to catch if may be some hint of unrealized things. It is a poetry of anticipation, dominated throughout by the presentiment of the

¹ *Memoir*, p. 42.

morrow—the keen foretaste of impending and inevitable change. That which we call the past was the living present once ; that which we call the present will be the dead past by and by. To-day and the things of to-day will not, and cannot, abide with us ; and the new morning which, willingly or unwillingly, we must all go forth to meet, will bring with it many things which must needs seem to us strange, and crude, and perchance even repugnant. “ Every new age has something new in it—takes up a new position.”¹ The older order of the world is breaking down under the stress of fresh thoughts, ideals, necessities ; and out of the confusion of actual life, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, even to guess as yet what new world-order, if any, is likely to arise. One thing at least is certain. The current which bears us so rapidly forward can be turned aside by no man’s power ; and for the large heart and brain of a poet like Clough there can therefore be no fact more momentous than this fact of change—no question more important than the question what this change will ultimately be found to mean.

The note of fluctuation, the attitude of eager watchfulness, the mood of inquiry, thus become characteristics of the great body of Clough’s work in verse. To one poem alone, however, shall we here refer in illustration—to

¹ *Letters of Parafidmus (Prose Remains, p. 382).*

a poem in which for the rest these qualities are perhaps most distinctly shown. Reprinted in his collected poems the verses bear the significant Heracleitean motto—*πάντα ῥεῖ· οὐδὲν μένει*; while in the *Letters of Parepidemus*, in which they were originally issued, they were prefaced by an interesting paragraph, a few sentences of which we here quote as the best commentary available upon the poem itself.

“We submit ourselves for instruction to teachers, and they teach us (or is it our awkwardness that we learn from them?) their faults and mistakes. Each new age and each new year has its new direction; and we go to the well-informed of the season before ours, to be put by them in the direction which, because right for their time, is therefore not quite right for ours.”¹

Thereupon follow the verses, which, however, we here reproduce in the somewhat altered form in which they are to be found in the collected poems:

“Upon the water, in the boat,
I sit and sketch as down I float;
The stream is wide, the view is fair,
I sketch it looking backward there.

“The stream is strong, and as I sit
And view the picture that we quit,

¹ *Prose Remains*, p. 383.

It flows and flows, and bears the boat,
And I sit sketching as we float.

“Each pointed height, each wavy line,
To new and other forms combine ;
Proportions vary, colors fade,
And all the landscape is remade.

“Depicted neither far nor near,
And larger there and smaller here,
And varying down from old to new,
E'en I can hardly think it true.

“Yet still I look, and still I sit,
Adjusting, shaping, altering it ;
And still the current bears the boat
And me, still sketching as I float.

“Still as I sit, with something new
The foreground intercepts the view ;
Even the distant mountain range
From the first moment suffers change.”

But while Clough's verse everywhere shows the man's resolute facing of the facts of life, and his intense realization of the changing order of the modern world, it reveals at the same time the inevitable fluctuations of his thought and feeling as he speculates upon the various spiritual problems persistently forced upon the attention of his age. His poetry is the poetry of moods—moods of comparative hopefulness, moods of weariness and despair,

moods of mere inquiry and deliberate reserve. To the superficial reader, turning over the pages of his collected works, there might even seem to be the strangest inconsistencies in the utterances of some of his shorter poems; for his sensitive nature catches up and repeats, though always in tempered tones, now the sad wail of some who mourn over the rapid dissolution of the world's great heritage of belief, and now again the glad shout of others who, boldly and trustfully, press forward to meet the coming day. But the wail and the shout—the song of sorrow and the song of promise—alike belong to the man himself, and, far from being discordant or incompatible, are in their own ways equally expressive of his relation to the great issues of the time. If there were seasons in which he could not but realize that hopes may be dupes, there were other occasions when he felt just as strongly that fears might be liars¹; and the full revelation of each of these alternating moods is to be found in his verse. His intellectual life was made up of one long struggle for settled conviction and the adjustment of emotion to knowledge; and his poems present us with the frank personal record of all the vacillation of mind, the hesitation, uncertainty, and self-torture, the swing of feeling from hopefulness to despondency and from despondency back to hopefulness, which such a

¹ See his poem, *Say Not the Struggle Nought Availeth*.

struggle brought with it, to a man of Clough's introspective habit, as one of its inevitable results.

The contrasted poems on Easter Day, written at Naples in 1849, may be taken to exhibit in the most vivid way the author's quick and delicate responsiveness to the evangel of faith and hope on the one hand and to that of doubt and darkness upon the other. Passing through "the great sinful streets" of the Italian city, the burden of a strange Easter message comes borne in upon him—"Christ is not risen."

“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust ;
As of the unjust, also of the just—
Yea, of that Just One, too !
This is the one sad Gospel that is true—
Christ is not risen !

“ Eat, drink, and play, and think that this is bliss :
There is no heaven but this ;
There is no hell
Save earth which serves the purpose doubly well,
Seeing it visits still
With equalest apportionment of ill
Both good and bad alike, and brings to one same
dust
The unjust and the just
With Christ, who is not risen.

“ Eat, drink, and die, for we are souls bereaved :
Of all the creatures under heaven’s wide cope

We are most hopeless, who had once most hope,
And most beliefless that had most believed.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust ;

As of the unjust, also of the just—

Yea, of that Just One too !

It is the one sad Gospel that is true—

Christ is not risen ! ”

A mournful song, indeed for Easter morning
—a song which interprets more impersonally
perhaps than most of Clough's poems the
world's sense of abject desolation and despair
as men find themselves suddenly astray in a
wilderness out of which light and meaning have
vanished forever, with the creeds that can never
be vitalized again.

“ And ye, ye ministers and stewards of a Word
Which ye would preach, because another heard—

Ye worshippers of that ye do not know,

Take these things hence and go :—

He is not risen ! ”

But the mood changes ; and the poet, after
thus filling his song with all the hopelessness
that comes with the realization of what has
been lost to human life, steps before us again
as the exponent of the high courage that may
still be inspired by thought of the great reali-
ties that still remain.

“ But in a later hour I sat and heard

Another voice that spake--another graver word.

Weep not, it bade, whatever hath been said,
Though He be dead, He is not dead.

In the true creed
He is yet risen indeed ;
Christ is yet risen.

“ Sit if ye will, sit down upon the ground,
Yet not to weep and wail, but calmly look around.

Whate’er befell,
Earth is not hell ;

Now, too, as when it first began,
Life is yet life, and man is man.

For all that breathe beneath the heaven’s high cope,
Joy with grief mixes, with despondence hope.

Hope conquers cowardice, joy grief :
Or at least, faith unbelief.

Though dead, not dead ;
Not gone, though fled ;
Not lost, though vanished.
In the great Gospel and true creed,
He is yet risen indeed ;
Christ is yet risen.”

Now, it is interesting to observe in this connection that as so many of Clough’s shorter poems are expressive of varying personal moods, so in like manner the two most permanently interesting of his three longer poems are both extremely elaborate presentations of natures out of balance within themselves ; while in the third, *The Bothie of Tobsr-na-Vuolich*, the element of inner warfare, though

less prominent, still plays an important part. The analysis of character disturbed by spiritual conflict had a natural fascination for him ; and in tracing out the details of the struggle, in dissecting the motives and counter-motives involved, in reaching down into the deep recesses of troubled minds, and in weighing circumstance against circumstance and feeling against feeling, he found all the keen interest inevitably arising from the fact that he was working artistically upon material largely drawn from the experiences of his own life. It is not, of course, intended to imply that such characters as Dipsychus and Claude are for a moment to be regarded simply as Clough himself masquerading in quasi-dramatic disguises. In the case of the latter at all events such a proposition would be clearly untenable. Yet in each of these subtly depicted personalities there is much, very much, that is manifestly auto-psychographical ; much that reminds us, as we study the play of antagonistic forces in their problematical natures, that we are very near indeed to the heart and brain of the man who gave them life.

So interesting are the two characters now referred to—Dipsychus, in the poem of that name, and Claude, in the *Amours de Voyage*—as exhibiting each in his own way Clough's intense sympathy with perplexed and introspective natures, and the extraordinary under-

standing which such sympathy gave him of the minutest details of their spiritual strife, that we shall be justified in pausing for a moment to examine a little more particularly the relation of these dramatic characters to the poet's own genius and personal contact with life.

The first-named of these poems, *Dipsychus*, may not inaptly be described as a kind of latter-day *Faust*. It is based upon a question already raised by the writer in some verses on *The Music of the World and of the Soul*. "Are there not, then, two musics unto men?" he had asked in this earlier production;—the coarse and overpowering din of daily toil and sordid striving; and the low, sweet melody of the spiritual life. It is this question that the later *Dipsychus* takes as its central theme; the purpose of the poem being (as we have seen the author himself state it) to present a fully elaborated study of idealism in its conflict with the Power of the world,¹ of which it naturally

¹ *Di.* Tell me thy name, now it is over.

Spirit.

Oh!

Why Mephistophiles, you know—

At least you 've lately called me so;

Belial it was some days ago.

But take your pick; I 've got a score—

Never a royal baby more.

For a brass plate upon a door

What think you of *Cosmocrator*?

Di. Τοὺς κοσμοκράτορας τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου.

And that you are indeed, I do not doubt you.

exaggerates the evil if not the potency. Dipsychus himself is, as the name implies, a "double self"¹—a being tortured by the conflict of adverse purposes, without force of will sufficient to decide once for all upon the alternative offered to him, yet miserable by reason of his own weakness and vacillation. He is morbidly sensitive and introspective; intensely alive to every influence from without, and to every ebb and flow of thought and emotion within; a highly-strung nature cherishing dreams of transcendent splendor and promise, and met everywhere by realities which at once seem destructive of his finest hopes and his noblest aspirations. The only other character in the first division of the poem is the Mephistophelian spirit by whom Dipsychus is constantly followed, and with whom he discusses at great length the "vext conundrums" of existence, as he finds them facing him, turn wheresoever he will. This spirit objectifies the anti-idealistic tendencies in the young man's speculative nature. It is his business to present all the lower aspects and ambitions of life in their most picturesque and attractive

Sp. Ephesians, ain't it? near the end
You've dropt a word to spare your friend.
What follows, too, in application
Would be absurd exaggeration.

Di. The Power of this world! Hateful unto God.
Dipsychus, Part ii., Scene 9.

¹ Part ii., Scene 5.

forms, to soften down the sharper edges of social injustice and wrongdoing, to exhibit the folly of visionary hopes and pietistic cravings, and to set forth in pleasing colors the loose, easy-going philosophy of existence of the *homme moyen sensuel*—the average, every-day mortal who takes things as he finds them, and bothers himself but little about the finer questions of right and wrong. The voice of the world, of conventionality, of respectability, is heard in all his utterances; his highest standard is expediency, his ultimate criterion, success. He twits Dipsychus upon his indecision of character; laughs in a perfectly good-tempered way at all his scruples and difficulties; caps his heroics with jingling verses of flippant humor, light cynicism, or delicate burlesque; and altogether behaves so much as a gentlemanly and quite unprincipled man of the world, that we are soon made to feel that of all conceivable companions for an over-speculative and inexperienced young fellow of the type of Dipsychus, such an one is, beyond discussion, the most dangerous. At length the unequal conflict ends; idealism inch by inch gives ground, and finally loses the day. "Welcome, O world, henceforth, and farewell dreams!"—with such words, Dipsychus yields allegiance to his new master. With what result? The second division of the poem, in which the soul's tragedy would have been followed to its completion, is

unfortunately represented only by the merest fragment; and thus such a question can be answered only by way of guess. Yet there can be but little doubt as to the general direction that the story would have taken. The first scene of the sequel shows us Dipsychus, many years later, a successful, famous, and wealthy man, and into the privacy of his study intrudes a woman whom long ago he had wronged. She congratulates him upon his high place and noble name, upon his domestic comfort, his power and prosperity; and he replies:

"Am I not rather
The slave and servant of the wretched world,
Liveried and finely dressed—yet all the same
A menial and a lacquey seeking place
For hire, and for his hire's sake doing work?"

Judged by the canon of true happiness, the man's solution of life's problem, for all its imposing superficial results, can only be pronounced a failure after all.

Now in reading such a poem as this, it is impossible for us not to recognize the partial identification of the poet with his character. *Dipsychus* does not exhibit the remorseless self-effacement, the determined objectivity, which are the prime conditions of true dramatic creation. The personal note is heard in it throughout. In many of the passages put into the mouth of the young idealist we detect the

accent of the writer's voice, while the man's general attitude towards the world and its problems is unmistakably Clough's own.¹ This of course must not be taken to mean that Clough intended *Dipsychus* to stand as a transcript from his own inner life—a mere reproduction of his personal soul-drama, of which, in Amiel's phrase, he had been so keensighted a spectator. But careful study of the poem makes it sufficiently clear that though *Dipsychus* is not to be hastily accepted as an elaborate piece of self-portraiture, his character is none the less made up of elements which Clough had had every reason to find dangerously prominent in his own intellectual constitution. In *Dipsychus*, in other words, it would seem that we have the exaggeration of the poet's introspective and skeptical tendencies, while his healthy sense of practical life, which as we shall presently see, gave ballast to his thought, is of set purpose eliminated almost entirely. The central meaning of the poem thus

¹ It may be pointed out as a matter of detail that Clough made no attempt to obscure the personal nature of much of this poem. In the opening scene, for instance, he makes *Dipsychus* refer to the first verses on Easter Day as his own production; while in Part ii., Scene 2, some lines put into the mouth of *Dipsychus* are reproduced almost *verbatim* from the close of the poem *The Hidden Love*. Such bitter verses as *Duty*, *In the Great Metropolis*, and *The Latest Decalogue*, remind us at once of some of the utterances of the World-spirit.

becomes manifest. Clough was too profound a student of his own life and character not to be fully alive to the dangers which threaten a nature such as his. He knew perfectly well that the habit of self-analysis may easily be pushed to morbid extremes; that healthy existence is only possible when the processes of mental as well as of physical growth are in a large measure left to take care of themselves; and that systematic mistrust and suspense of judgment tend in the upshot to bring about infirmity of purpose and a total collapse of the faith which is needed to furnish any working hypothesis for life. *Dipsychus* may therefore be described as a study made by Clough from himself, in which, however, one aspect of his character is thrown into exaggerated relief for the purpose of emphasizing its logical tendency towards self-stultification and spiritual bankruptcy.

That the interpretation here given to the poem is in the main the correct one, is shown by the comments contained in the Epilogue, already cited. Here special stress is laid upon the weakness of will superinduced by modern methods of education, and the introspective habit of mind to which these give rise, and upon the liability of "the over-tender conscience" to "exaggerate the wickedness of the world." Indecision of character, lack of robustness and actuality, intellectual fasti-

diousness with all its attendant evils—these are the qualities brought out as causes of the downfall of the young idealist's fine-cut imperfectly-poised nature. Elsewhere, speaking now distinctly for himself, Clough returns to the same theme in these well weighed sentences: "Between the extremes of ascetic and timid self-culture, and of unquestioning, unhesitating confidence, we may consent to see and tolerate every kind and gradation of intermixture. Nevertheless, upon the whole, for the present age, the lessons of reflectiveness and the habits of caution do not appear to be more needful or appropriate than exhortations to steady courage, and calls to action. There is something certainly of an over-educated weakness of purpose in Western Europe—not in Germany only, or in France, but also in more busy England. There is a disposition to press too far the finer and subtler intellectual and moral susceptibilities; to insist upon following out, as they say, to their logical consequences, the notices of some organ of the spiritual nature; a proceeding which perhaps is hardly more sensible in the grown man than it would be in the infant to refuse to correct the sensations of sight by those of the touch. Upon the whole, we are disposed to follow out, if we must follow out at all, the analogy of the bodily senses; we are inclined to accept rather than investigate; and to put our con-

fidence less in arithmetic and antinomies than in

“A few strong instincts and a few plain rules.”¹

Now, all that we have said, by way of interpretation, about *Dipsychus*, will apply with even greater force to the second of the two poems now in question—the *Amours de Voyage*; a more interesting work in itself, and one showing in its general structure a finer quality of art. If we have been justified in describing *Dipsychus* as a kind of latter-day *Faust*, we may aptly call Claude, the principal figure of the *Amours*, a modern Hamlet, cast in a quite unheroic mould, and confronted by a life-problem of the common and every-day order. Once more, studying his dramatic character from what he has found actual or potential, developed or latent within himself, Clough undertakes to draw for us just such a young man as he conceives might be taken as a typical product of our age of over-culture, over-refinement, over-speculation. Claude is a pleasant, high-minded, well-read fellow, with large interests and fine enthusiasms, and many personal qualities calculated to arouse our admiration; but his will-power is almost paralyzed by his persistent skepticism. His whole life is “sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.” To try every

¹ *Review of Some Poems by Alexander Smith and Matthew Arnold (Prose Remains, pp. 372-73).*

circumstance, to probe and reprobe every feeling, to go behind every judgment; such is the habit of his mind. He will take no intuition upon its own validity, while as for his motives, he weighs them so carefully and analyzes them so keenly, that one by one they evaporate "and lose the name of action." His knowledge is wide and his philosophic eclecticism unbounded. His only solution for any problem is to open it up again in its entirety, and re-discuss it in all its bearings. To every question he returns the same answer—yea, yet nay; with the possible variation, nay, yet perhaps yea. He understands, of course,—for he has studied himself to good purpose—that the power of looking on all sides of every proposition must often mean lack of the power of acting on the merits of any one of them—that a certain onesidedness of character, a certain limitation of vision, is a prerequisite condition to anything like practical success. There would be no need to remind him that the apostles and martyrs were not broad men. Strength, firmness, decision he admires vastly in others, and Garibaldi and Mazzini he mentions always with respect and sometimes with genuine feeling. But for himself, he finds it impossible to make up his mind to anything. There is always so much to be said on the other side.

With admirable tact and skill Clough lays

the scene of his story in Italy, during the time of the futile republican struggle of 1849, "when from Janiculan heights thundered the cannon of France."¹ In this way he secures a fine background of practical activity against which the irresolution of his hero stands out with startling distinctness. The stirring events of the crisis, the deeds of courage performed almost beneath his eyes, the excited groups of the café and the street corners, have a temporary influence upon his sensitive nature. He is aroused by a brief spasm of energy, which, however, finds its principal outlet in talk. He feels that it is a noble thing to "offer one's blood an oblation to freedom"; he dreams of "great indignations and angers transcendental"; he is thankful when there is actually some fighting, and rejoices that the Frenchmen are beaten and the friends of freedom triumphant. Still, there are so many considerations to be urged against his taking any personal part in the fray. "Individual culture is also something," for instance; and to individual culture practical soldiering, with its distractions, would prove a very serious obstacle. Moreover, he has no musket; if he had one,

¹ It will be remembered that Clough was himself in Rome during this period, and was a deeply-moved eyewitness of many of the events described or referred to in his poem. His letters written at this time furnish an interesting commentary on the political portions of the work.

he would not know how to use it; just at present he is preoccupied with ancient marbles; he rather believes that he owes his life to his own country; and then—well, there was a fifth reason, which somehow he has forgotten; but still “four good reasons are ample.” More than ample, we should say; for as the swift days, with their grand opportunities, slip by, Claude remains inert—interested, fascinated, often touched to the quick; but still inert.

Equally skilful is the poet's management of the more purely personal side of his story. Claude is in love; or, at least, he rather believes, for a time, that he is—for he cannot after all quite satisfy himself that what he takes for love may not in the end turn out to be the merely “factitious” results of “juxtaposition—and what is juxtaposition?” Thus once again what Georgina Trevellyn patly calls the “shilly-shally” quality of his nature betrays him into sheer weakness and consequent wretchedness. Meanwhile the object of his affections, or at all events of his fancy, is presented to us as an admirable foil to his character. She is a simple, practical-minded, straightforward little English girl, absolutely unsophisticated, full of common sense, and with a way of looking at things and of dealing with them the very antithesis of her strange and unsatisfactory lover's. We feel as we read their letters that if anything in the world could save

the poor young fellow from the fate of his temperament and education, it would be the love and help and—let us admit it—the British Philistinism, of such a girl as “juxtaposition” here throws into his way. But the incipient love-story of course comes to nothing. After pages of epistolary self-revelation, and days and nights of argument and introspection on the part of Claude, circumstances intervene, and put a summary close to the entire episode. Claude is suddenly stung to a realization of the chance he has wasted, and for a moment seems to stand on the verge of definite action. But the inspiration subsides once more under the relentless pressure of thought. “After all, do I know that I really care so about her?” he inquires. “After all, perhaps, there is something factitious about it; I have had pain, it is true; I have wept, and so have the actors.”

With a short-sightedness rare in his criticism, Emerson complained that Clough should have made the story end so unsatisfactorily. But how could it have ended otherwise? Like *Dipsychus*, the *Amours de Voyage* is both a study and a warning. It is a study once again of “over-educated weakness of purpose”; it is a warning against the disastrous moral results which, as Clough felt so keenly, our modern subjective tendencies threaten to bring in their train.

IV.

The above considerations will help us to understand another salient characteristic of Clough's poetry—its constant insistence upon our modern need for a simpler and less sophisticated relation with life and its facts than seems possible to most cultivated men in our present state of civilization. There is something deeply pathetic about the way in which this perplexed and sensitive man of the century, borne down by

“that load, which where
Thought is, is with it”—¹

face to face with the “vext conundrums of existence,” struggling to disentangle his own “twisted thinkings,” and unable to shake himself free from his haunting self-consciousness, is to be found crying out again and again from the depths of his troubled heart for more simplicity, more healthy and direct contact with reality, less examination of motive and feeling, less theorizing about things. “*Balzac n’a pas eu le temps de vivre*,” writes Monsieur Bourget, in reference to the great French novelist’s ceaseless activity and unremitting toil. In much the same spirit Clough is always proclaiming that men have become so pre-occupied with the problems arising out of existence,

¹ *Two Moods*.

that life's possibilities of enjoyment escape them, its manifold chances slip by them unobserved and unutilized. Could we but become as children, accepting the moment for what it brings us, made restless by no *arrière pensée*, and harassed by no pitiless and importunate questions that drive us crazy by their iteration, and remain unanswered and unanswerable at the last, what a heaven of happiness would be open to every one of us, hour by hour, day by day! "O blessed ages of pure, spontaneous, unconscious, unthinking, unreasoning life and action, to you, either in the past or the future, the human heart is still fain to recur—still must dream, even though it be but a dream, of how sweet it were to grow as the green herb, to bloom as the spring flowers, to be good because we cannot be otherwise, and happy because we cannot help it. O, blessed ages indeed! But have such, since men were men, ever been? Or are such, while men are men, ever likely to come?"¹ Certainly there seems but small chance of such a consummation in the age in which we ourselves live. Never was the world further from the "negative capability" of which Keats wrote—never more likely to make shipwreck of its peace and satisfaction upon the

¹ *Extracts from a Review of a Work Entitled Considerations on Some Recent Social Theories.* Originally published in the *North American Review*, for July, 1853. Reprinted in *Prose Remains*, pp. 405-12.

shoals of speculation and amid the breakers of thought.

Let us take, by way of illustrating Clough's feeling about these matters, a passage or two from the longer poems just above dealt with. Here, for instance, is one in which Claude, of the *Amours de Voyage*, expresses himself with a sudden outburst of bitterness which is the more instructive by reason of the very fact that it lacks entirely the youth's customary philosophic placidity.

“ Hang this thinking, at last ! what good is it ?
 oh, and what evil !
 Oh, what mischief and pain ! like a clock in a sick
 man's chamber,
 Ticking and ticking, and still through each covert
 of slumber pursuing.
 What shall I do to thee, O thou Preserver of men ?
 Have compassion ;
 Be favorable and hear ! Take from me this regal
 knowledge ;
 Let me contented and mute, with the beasts of the
 fields, my brothers,
 Tranquilly, happily lie,—and eat grass like Nebu-
 chadnezzar ! ”¹

This of course has the note of extravagance—of extreme and unreasoning disgust. But in more temperate phrascology, Claude had only just before given utterance to the same reactionary feeling.

¹ *Amours du Voyage*, Canto iii., § 10.

"Life is beautiful, Eustace, entrancing, enchanting
 to look at ;
 As are the streets of a city we pace while the car-
 riage is changing,
 As a chamber filled in with harmonious, exquisite
 pictures,
 Even so beautiful Earth ; and could we eliminate
 only
 This vile hungering impulse, this demon within us
 of craving,
 Life were beatitude, living a perfect divine satis-
 faction." ¹

Thus does Claude more calmly define his
 position ; and in words that are strangely simi-
 lar—for the two passages almost paraphrase
 one another—Dipsychus deliberately declares
 himself to the same effect.

"Yes, it is beautiful ever, let foolish men rail at it
 never.
 Yes, it is beautiful truly, my brothers, I grant it you
 duly.
 Wise are ye others that choose it, and happy ye all
 that can use it.
 Life it is beautiful wholly, and could we eliminate
 only
 This interfering, enslaving, o'ermastering demon
 of craving,
 This wicked tempter inside us to ruin still eager to
 guide us,
 Life were beatitude, action a possible pure satis-
 faction." ²

¹ *Amours du Voyage*, Canto iii., § 8.

² *Dipsychus*, Part ii., Scene 2.

These, indeed, are quasi-dramatic utterances, though the personal accent in them can hardly be mistaken. Let us, therefore, join with them a single passage in which Clough speaks very distinctly for himself. He is preaching a sermon on the old text: "This also, saith the Preacher, is a sore evil that I have seen under the sun."

"To grow old, therefore, learning and unlearning, is such the conclusion? Conclusion or no conclusion, such, alas! appears to be our inevitable lot, the fixed ordinance of the life we live. The cruel King Tarchetius gave his daughters a web to weave, upon the completion of which he said they should get married; and what these involuntary Penelopes did in the daytime, servants by his orders undid at night. A hopeless and weary work, indeed, especially for young people desirous to get married.

"Weaving and unweaving, learning and unlearning, learning painfully, painfully unlearning, under the orders of the cruel King Tarchetius, behold—are we to say 'our life'? 'Every new lesson,' saith the Oriental proverb, 'is another gray hair; and time will pluck out this also.' And what said the Preacher? 'I, the Preacher, was King over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under the heavens; this sore travail hath God given unto the sons of men to be exercised

therewith.' *Perché pensa? Pensando s'invvecchia,*' said the young unthinking Italian to the grave German sitting by him in the diligence, whose name was Goethe. Is it true?

"To spend uncounted years of pain
 Again, again, and yet again,
 In working out in heart and brain
 The problem of our being here;
 To gather facts from far and near;
 Upon the mind to hold them clear,
 And, knowing more may yet appear,
 Unto one's latest breath to fear
 The premature result to draw,—
 Is this the object, end, and law
 And purpose of our being here?"¹

An unintentional and indirect answer to the question propounded in these verses may perhaps be found in the writer's beautiful and delicate little *London Idyl*.

Nor is it happiness alone, as Clough feels, that we are in danger of losing through our modern sophistication. We are in danger of losing robustness, our practical hold upon things, our chances of usefulness, as well. Tell me, asks Claude, in a letter to his confident, Eustace,

"Tell me, my friend, do you think that the brain
 would sprout in the furrow,

¹ *Letters of Parepidemus* (*Prose Remains*, pp. 384-85). The verses are published separately in Clough's *Poems* under the title *Perché Pensa? Pensando s'Invvecchia*.

Did it not truly accept as its *summum* and *ultimum bonum*

That mere common and may be indifferent soil it is set in?

Would it have force to develop and open its young cotyledons,

Could it compare, and reflect, and examine one thing with another?

Would it endure to accomplish the round of its natural functions

Were it endowed with a sense of the general scheme of existence?"¹

The question thus raised has, it need hardly be said, human and moral bearings of wide sweep and significance.

V.

And now it will not be difficult for us to understand what seems to us to be the most important element in Clough's general philosophy of life—his faith in work—hard, steady, practical work—as a corrective to over-speculation and its manifold and insidious evils. Upon this point Clough has been more than once misrepresented, and there is thus the more need for us to lay stress upon it here. To hold fast to reality, and to do something—such is the gist of much of his most earnest teaching. We cannot be saved from the dangers of sophistication by argument or theory; to attempt this

¹ *Amours du Voyage*, Canto iii., § 2.

course would only be to submerge ourselves at last in quagmires of more desperate depths. We must have our intellectual sanity preserved or restored for us by healthy contact with the world of every-day fact. Herein lies the explanation of the final success of Philip Hewson in *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*. Enthusiast and dreamer as he is, he nevertheless remains in firm touch with actuality, and is willing to turn with simple, manly courage to the task-work which it is given him to do. Contrast this more sturdy apostle of the ideal with such characters as Claude and Dipsychus; mark his solution of the problem of existence and the tragic issues of the intellectual struggles of these others; and the purpose of the poet becomes perfectly clear.

"Do we not work best by digging deepest? by avoiding polemics, and searching to display the real thing?" he asks, in a letter to Thomas Arnold (the younger).¹ And again, addressing a nameless friend: "Enter the arena of your brethren, and go not to your grave without knowing what common merchants and solicitors, much more sailors and coalheavers are acquainted with. Ignorance is a poor kind of innocence. The world is wiser than the wise, and as innocent as the innocent; and it has long been found out what is the best way of taking things. 'The earth,' said the great

¹ *Prose Remains*, p. 170.

traveller, 'is much the same wherever we go'; and the changes of position which women and students tremble and shilly-shally before, leave things much as they found them. *Cælum non animum mutant*. The winter comes and destroys all, but in the spring the old grasses come up all the greener. Let us not sit in a corner and mope, and think ourselves clever, for our comfort, while the room is full of dancing and cheerfulness. The sum of the whole matter is this. Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it without fiddle-faddling; for there is no experience, nor pleasure, nor pain, nor instruction, nor anything else in the grave whither thou goest. When you get to the end of this life, you won't find another ready-made in which you can do without effort what you were meant to with effort here."¹ And once more: "Meantime, in defence of silence, I have always an impression that what is taken to talk with, is lost to act with; you cannot speak your wisdom and have it. . . . All things become clear to me by work more than by anything else. Any kind of drudgery will help one out of the most uncommon either sentimental or speculative perplexity; the attitude of work is the only one in which one can see things properly. One may be afraid sometimes of destroying the beauty of one's dreams by doing anything, losing sight of what perhaps

¹ *Prose Remains*, pp. 173-74.

one may not be able to recover ; it need not be so." ¹ With these fine words in mind, every reader of Clough will turn with renewed affection to the noble poem in which, of all others, these ideas concerning the sanctity of work, find their fullest expression—*Qui Laborat, Orat.*

"O only Source of all our light and life,
Whom as our truth, our strength, we see and feel,
But whom the hours of mortal, moral strife
Alone aright reveal !

"Mine inmost soul before Thee inly brought,
Thy presence owns ineffable, divine ;
Chastised each rebel self-encentred thought,
My will adoreth Thine.

"With eye down-dropt, if then this earthly mind
Speechless remain, or speechless e'en depart ;
Nor seek to see—for what of earthly kind
Can see Thee as Thou art ?

"If well-assured 't is but profanely bold
In thought's abstractest forms to seem to see,
It dare not dare the dread communion hold
In ways unworthy Thee.

"O not unowned, thou shalt unnamed forgive,
In worldly walks the prayerless heart prepare ;
And if in work its life it seem to live,
Shalt make that work be prayer.

¹ *Prose Remains*, p. 180.

“Nor times shall lack, when while the work it plies,
Unsummoned powers the blinding film shall part,
And scarce by happy tears made dim, the eyes
In recognition start.

“But, as Thou willest, give or e'en forbear
The beatific supersensual sight,
So, with Thy blessing blest, that humbler prayer
Approach Thee morn and night.”

We have said that Clough's poetry is a poetry of skepticism, the utterance of varying moods. It remains to add that the skepticism was always courageous, the moods, even at their darkest, touched with a radiance that came from faith in the upshot of things. About this man and his work there was nothing mawkish or sentimental. He was too sane to nurse despair, too manly to harp persistently upon the mouldered strings of life. Hence, in spite of all its perplexity, its craving, its restlessness, his verse possesses the finest inspirational qualities for readers who are able to adopt, even provisionally, his lofty and disinterested point of view. He has nothing to tell us that will serve to make life less strenuous, less complex, less enigmatical; nothing that will lighten our sense of individual responsibility, or help to cultivate within us that essentially vulgar temper—the temper of easy-going optimism. But the note of fortitude, of self-reliance, is to be heard in all his work; and to this fortitude, to

this self-reliance, motive and purpose are given by his unshaken belief that somehow, in some mysterious way, a dramatic purpose runs through the life of the world, moulding and directing the immature and seemingly ineffectual energies of men to issues of good as yet unseen and undreamed of.

To illustrate this high courage and this inspiration of the larger hope in Clough's writings a few brief citations will suffice.

"Are you aware," he writes in one of his letters from America, "that life is very like a railway?"¹ One gets into deep cuttings and long dark tunnels, where one sees nothing and hears twice as much noise as usual, and one can't read, and one shuts up the window and waits, and then it all comes clear again. Only in life it sometimes feels as if one had to dig the tunnel as one goes along, all new for oneself. Go straight on, however, and one's sure to come out into a new country, on the other side the hills, sunny and bright. There's an apologue for you!"²

From an earlier letter the following sentences may be reproduced for their expression of the man's informing faith in the persistency of the saving forces of the world. Their fine impersonality will hardly escape attention.

¹ The comparison of life with a railway-tunnel, from which we may by and by emerge into sunshine and clear day, will be found again in the *Amours de Voyage*, Canto v., § 9.

² *Prose Remains*, p. 205.

"It is far nobler to teach people to do what is good because it is good simply, than for the sake of any future reward. . . . Besides if *we* die and come to nothing it does not therefore follow that life and goodness will cease to be in earth and heaven. If we give over dancing, it does n't therefore follow that the dance ceases itself, or the music. Be satisfied that whatever is good in us will be immortal; and as the parent is content to die in the consciousness of the child's survival, even so, why not we? There 's a creed which will suffice for the present."¹

And now for two short poems in which these same principles of life and faith are set forth in the distinctest possible way.

"Whate'er you dream with doubt possest,
Keep, keep it snug within your breast,
And lay you down and take your rest;
Forget in sleep the doubt and pain,
And when you wake, to work again.
The wind it blows, the vessel goes,
And where and whither, no one knows.

"'T will all be well; no need of care;
Though how it will, and when, and where,
We cannot see, and can't declare.
In spite of dreams, in spite of thought,
'T is not in vain, and not for nought,
The wind it blows, the ship it goes,
Though where and whither, no one knows."²

¹ *Prose Remains*, p. 139.

² *All Is Well*.

In the reading of these lines we feel that we are able to understand the working philosophy of Clough's life. Do your best, in all courage and humility, holding yourself secure in the faith that the heart of the universe is sound, and that the processes of the world can be trusted for the results. Viewing existence from the standpoint of our own little experiences, with their struggles, their constant failures, their unrealized aspirations, their thwarted aims, we may often find ourselves disheartened and dismayed. At such seasons as these we may seek renewal of hope in rising above the level of our petty individual lives, and in surveying man and his destiny in a more impersonal way.

" It fortifies my soul to know
That, though I perish, Truth is so :
That, howso'er I stray and range,
Whate'er I do, Thou dost not change.
I steadier step when I recall
That if I slip, Thou dost not fall."¹

The poetry of Clough will never appeal to a very wide circle of readers. In both matter and style, it lacks the elements that ensure popularity; for it carries with it too heavy a burden of thought; and it is, moreover, taken

¹ " *With Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*" The later verses, " *Say not the struggle nought availeth,*" may be referred to in the same connection.

as a whole, deficient in flexibility, warmth, and color. But for the student of nineteenth-century thought and its development in literature, his writings possess almost unique interest and value. For they are the utterance of a man of whom Mr. Lowell, without exaggeration, has written: "I have a foreboding that Clough, imperfect as he was in many respects, and dying before he had subdued his sensitive temperament to the sterner requirements of his art, will be thought a hundred years hence to have been the truest expression in verse of the moral and intellectual tendencies, the doubt and struggle towards settled convictions, of the period in which he lived."¹

¹ *Essay on Swinburne's Tragedies*. See also his passing judgment in his paper *On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners*.

III.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

III.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

I.

THE subject of our study in the present chapter is Matthew Arnold the poet; and it will be well to understand clearly at the outset that the delightful prose works through which this writer made his influence so widely felt will be referred to only incidentally, and for the light which they may be found to throw upon the methods and characteristics of his verse. An initial word concerning the relation between these two expressions of his genius will none the less be desirable at the commencement of our discussion.

It cannot have escaped the observation of even the most casual reader of Arnold's collected writings that between his verse as a whole, on the one hand, and his prose, as a whole upon the other, there is a profound difference of tone and spiritual quality. Each is indeed marked by the same note of high and firm courage; each reveals the same graciousness and urbanity of phrase and manner; each is

evidently in equal degree the output of a singularly sane and noble nature. But the one is weighted down by the persistent sense of misgiving, gloom, futility, and despair; while the other, taken in the mass, is wonderfully strong, buoyant, cheery, and decisive. What is the meaning of this remarkable difference? Why should Arnold have made his prose the vehicle of breezy hopefulness, and have reserved his poetry as the medium of his more melancholy utterances concerning human life and destiny?

A double answer may be suggested by way of partial explanation. In the first place, Arnold's verse is, broadly speaking, the production of his earlier manhood; while his great prose work belongs to his maturer years. It is natural, therefore, that the former should be full of a young man's struggle, uncertainty, and questioning; and just as natural that the latter should be marked by constructive effort and the general settlement of thought. Arnold's spiritual pilgrimage lay for a protracted period along dark and difficult ways, and of the moods engendered by the experiences of his speculative conflicts his poetry is the lucid but always dignified expression. But even as that poetry itself shows us, his nature was at bottom too practical and healthy to remain permanently satisfied with merely negative results. To linger by the wayside, and complain that the

road was rough, and the journey of life hard and toilsome, might be well enough for a season. His utterances brought him a measure of relief, and they helped to soothe and comfort, even if they did not exactly inspire, many fellow-wayfarers, distracted and downhearted like himself. But the hour came when he was to feel the goading impulse of manhood's sterner needs; and then he turned to the task of breaking new paths for his generation, pressing forward himself through thicket and morass in the direction wherein, as he believed, lay the promise of open skies, and fresh air, and new light. Of these pioneer efforts we may read the record in Arnold's later prose, which palpitates with the courage of the pathfinder, and the exhilaration which comes from experiment and adventure in the vanguard of the world's progressive thought.

But beyond this, when we contrast the tone and spirit of Arnold's verse with the tone and spirit of his prose, we find ourselves confronted by an illustration, on a small and personal scale, of that inevitable tendency of the emotions to lag behind the intellect, which is exhibited at large in the general history of nineteenth-century thought. In Arnold's verse, the feelings are in the ascendant, and strike the keynote of his criticism upon life. In his prose the intellect takes the lead, and sweeps on whither the emotions might often

find it difficult to follow. The one speaks for the heart, and comes as a simple cry out of the great darkness. The other takes its inspiration from a clear brain, resolutely facing the causes of the existing spiritual unrest, and striving to make palpable to self and others the means whereby the new era of adjustment, with its larger faith and wider religious outlook, may ultimately be brought about.

Taken together, the two considerations here touched upon will, we think, go far to explain the difference in mood and temper between Arnold the poet and Arnold the essayist—between the author of *Dover Beach*, and the *Stanzas to Obermann*, for example, on the one hand, and the author of *Culture and Anarchy* and *God and the Bible* on the other. They help us at least to a partial understanding of a preliminary question of real importance—the question, namely, why, after showing his high and pure gift of song in the productions of his earlier years, Arnold should then have practically abandoned verse altogether, turning to prose as the fitting medium for the large constructive undertakings to which the greater part of his later life was to be devoted.

II.

Of the formative conditions of Matthew Arnold's intellectual development we need

speak only in brief, since they were practically the same as those we have already analyzed with some approach to detail in the case of his friend and spiritual kinsman, Clough.

As the son of Thomas Arnold of Rugby, the subject of our present study naturally felt the full influence of that magnetic personality which, as we have seen, played so large a part in the moulding of Clough's genius and character. If the force and inspiration of "that great teacher of historic truth, that greater teacher of moral right,"¹ were so operative in the case of a mere pupil, their potency in the case of a son temperamentally impressionable and responsive in the highest degree, must have been still more marked. Yet here we broach a curious question in relation to the tendency of Thomas Arnold's power over the younger generation—a question which Clough himself touched upon with some resolution in the Epilogue to *Dipsychus*, and which is forced even more directly upon our attention as we come to examine the intellectual differences separating father and son. The elder Arnold would have been the last of teachers to desire to foster the speculative and introspective habits of mind which none the less became singularly characteristic of the best of the men who went out from the Rugby of his time. He was himself a thinker of the most positive order; emi-

¹ Freeman, *Inaugural Lecture*, 1884.

nently level-headed, sane, well-balanced; and marked, as his son remembered well, by "buoyant cheerfulness clear."¹ With little talent and less inclination for abstract and metaphysical discussion, he treated the theological questions that grew out of the progressive conditions of his age from the standpoint of sound, liberal commonsense, priding himself especially upon his opposition to the subtleties and vagaries of Newmanism; and finding the material for the great literary undertaking of his life in the doings of the Romans—a people he admired greatly for their sterling practical character, "their love of institutions and order, and their reverence for law."² How it came about, therefore, that a man of this steady and wholesome type should actually have imparted a bias so different from his own to so many of the young men who had been thrown or drawn within the magic circle of his personal power, would seem indeed a puzzle without solution did we not recall the fact, already dwelt on in our previous essay, that his whole method and system of school-government—his habit of treating boys as intellectually responsible beings, his constant appeal to their sense of truth and honor—were exactly calculated to produce that scrupulousness in action, high regard for right, and intense feeling of personal obligation, which

¹ *Rugby Chapel*, November, 1857.

² Stanley's *Life of Dr. Arnold*, Vol. i., p. 189.

combined to distinguish the men of Arnold's making, and led in the case of the more sensitive among them to over-excitation of the religious feeling, and almost morbid irritability of conscience. "It 's all Arnold's doing. He spoilt the public schools"; such we remember was the comment of the outspoken old uncle in the Epilogue to *Dipsychus*. "Dr. Arnold," wrote an astute and far-sighted critic, "was almost indisputably an admirable master for a common English boy—the small, apple-eating animal whom we know. He worked—he pounded, if the phrase may be used—into the boy a belief, or at any rate a floating confused conception, that there are great subjects, that there are strange problems, that knowledge has an indefinite value, that life is a serious and solemn thing. The influence of Arnold's teaching upon the majority of his pupils, was probably very vague, but very good. . . . But there are a few minds which are very likely to think too much of such things. A susceptible, serious, intellectual boy may be injured by the incessant inculcation of the awfulness of life, and the magnitude of great problems. It is not desirable to take this world too much *au sérieux*: most persons will not; and the one in a thousand, should not."¹ All this is well

¹ Walter Bagehot, *Mr. Clough's Poems*. This article contains an admirable discussion of the influence of "Arnoldism" in leading up to and paving the way for "Newmanism."

said, and helps us to understand how it happened that Thomas Arnold's best pupils were men who in after life were characterized, as Clough and the younger Arnold were characterized, not by their teacher's robustness, certainty, positiveness, and practicality, but often enough by qualities the reverse of these.

Trained thus in the same early environment, Arnold like Clough left the Rugby of his father's *régime* only to enter the Oxford of Tractarian days, and there undergo a similar intellectual upheaval. To trace the development of his mind during this difficult period of test and strain is for the time being at least impossible, no such data as we have before us in the published memoir and letters of Clough having in Arnold's case as yet been given to the world.¹ But to the influence exerted upon his own life, as upon the lives of so many of his contemporaries, by the personality and subtle power of Newman, he bore emphatic testimony when towards the close of his career he came to speak of the voices that were in the air, inspiring, warning, counselling, during his undergraduate days. "Who could resist," he writes,

¹ It is with a certain regret that we find ourselves obliged to leave the statement in the text standing, after perusal of the recently published two volumes of *Letters*. These volumes open, it will be remembered, with the year 1848, when Arnold was already twenty-six years of age, and had just been appointed private secretary to Lord Lansdowne. The light they throw upon the particular and critical period of his life now under discussion, is, therefore, very slight indeed.

in one of his most beautiful prose passages, "the charm of that spiritual apparition, gliding in the dim afternoon light through the aisles of St. Mary's, rising into the pulpit, and then, in the most entrancing of voices, breaking the silence with words and thoughts which were a religious music—subtle, sweet, mournful. I seem to hear him still saying—'After the fever of life, after weariness and sickness, fightings and despondings, languor and fretfulness, struggling and succeeding, after all the changes and chances of this troubled, unhealthy state, at length comes death, at length the white throne of God, at length the beatific vision.'"¹ Who, indeed, could resist such personal magic as this? It is not difficult to understand the appeal that such an influence as Newman's must have made to the strongly-developed religious side of Arnold's nature. But the effect of the great ecclesiastic's teaching, however profound it may have been at the time, did not and could not prove of enduring character. In later years he could insist upon the beauty and sweetness, and more than these, upon the strength and persistency of the Oxford tradition, and boldly point to the protest which the Tractarian movement had made, and to a certain extent, as he believed, successfully made, against the philistine rawness and crudity of English middle-class liberalism.² But the lines

¹ Lecture on Emerson, in *Discourses in America*.

² *Culture and Anarchy*, Chap. i.

which this movement had followed Arnold could not adopt; and in his case, as in the case of so many others, the inevitable reaction was not long delayed. Thrown back upon himself for guidance and direction, he thus found himself at length taking up the skeptic's position. It became his business to try the grounds of faith and hope; to cast aside out of the world's great heritage of spiritual tradition much that he realized to be no longer tenable; and to fortify himself for the acceptance of a great mass of new facts and theories to which, had it been possible, he would willingly have closed his eyes. In later years, in *Literature and Dogma* and *God and the Bible*, he was to make a definite attempt towards the solution of some of the most momentous problems of the age; offering these works as his own contribution to the new religious synthesis of which he early came to feel that we are in pressing need. It is natural that such constructive efforts, vague and unsatisfactory as to most critics, orthodox and heterodox alike, they must necessarily seem to be, should to their author himself have brought something of the rest and peace only to be found in settled faith.¹ But

¹ Mr. Samuel Waddington writes: "I possess a photograph of him [Arnold] taken nearly thirty years ago, and the expression is more grave and *triste* than that his features usually wore in the later years of his life." In *The Poets and Poetry of the Century*, ed. by A. H. Miles; Vol. *Kingsley to Thomson*, pp. 95, 96.

before they could be put forth, Arnold had to pass through a long period of ferment, uncertainty, and dejection; and it was out of this period, as we have said, that the greater part of his poetry came. To catch the full meaning of

“the undertone that flows
So calmly sad through all his stately lays,”¹

we must, therefore, try to understand the condition of his mind during this time—his temper and spiritual outlook; since in comprehension of these things alone will be found the explanation of many of the predominant characteristics of his verse.

And here once again our simplest course will be to set Arnold in comparison with Clough, for the two men met the changes and problems of their time with fundamentally the same kind of response. We have laid stress upon the fine sanity of Clough's mind, upon the keenness of his intellect, his hatred of illusion, his single eye for truth, his unflinching courage, his undeviating honesty. All these admirable qualities will be found equally developed in the character of his better-known friend. Arnold, too, was a seeker after truth, impatient of sham, subterfuge, and mysticism, intolerant of the vague, the fanciful, the far-fetched; determined to stand face to face with fact. As Mr. William

¹ Principal J. C. Shairp, quoted in same volume, p. 86.

Watson has written of him, he "brook no disguise."¹ Intensely alive to the changing order of the world, to the gradual break-up of the old, and the slow and painful incoming of the new, he realized that in the midst of all the upheaval of such a period of transition, there was but one safe and manly course—to stand firm, adhere to reality, and accept the issue be that issue what it might. From the very outset of his career, therefore, his attitude was definitely taken up. He knew that one cannot get rid of the influences of the time-spirit by turning one's back upon them, with Keats and Rossetti, or attacking them with all the eloquence of vituperation with Ruskin and Carlyle. For the time-spirit and its doings, as he himself phrased it, he professed the most profound respect—in other words, he recognized the inevitableness of the century's movements in speculation and in society, of the lapse of ancient creeds, of the influx of new knowledge, ideals, fashions of life, habits of thought.

"For rigorous teachers seized my youth
And purged its faith and trimmed its fire ;
Show'd me the high white star of truth,
There bade me gaze and there aspire." :

thus could he write of his earlier discipline in a poem to which we shall have occasion to

¹ *In Laleham Churchyard.*

refer more at length directly in another connection.¹ With such noble singleness of purpose, fortitude, and consistency, did he accept the mark of this high calling, that the proud words put into the mouth of his Empedocles may fitly be applied to himself :

“ Yea, I take myself to witness,
That I have loved no darkness,
Sophisticated no truth,
Nursed no delusion,
Allow'd no fear ! ”

We have spoken of the intellectual differences separating the elder from the younger Arnold. Yet Matthew none the less shows himself his father's son in his desire to keep close to practical life, in the simple, straightforwardness of his mental processes, and in his constantly-expressed distrust of mysticism, vagueness, and unintelligibility. His reiterated disclaimer of philosophic talent or consistency, his curious dislike of elaborate metaphysical systems, his everlasting insistence upon the fact that while he is discussing politics, or theology, or social theories, he is all the while merely a plain man talking plainly to plain folk ; all these familiar characteristics of his later work will occur to every reader as illustrations to the present point. Studiously unpedantic in thought, and

¹ *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse.*

almost affectedly unacademic in style, the real Arnold thus revealed to us has scarcely even a shadowy likeness to the mythical Arnold of popular thought—the Oxford fine gentleman, half-scholar, half-dandy; prophet of the kid-glove persuasion, as the *Daily Telegraph* conceived him; elegant and spurious Jeremiah, nursing his own melancholy, prattling of his new culture, and holding himself severely apart from the common herd, as he lives in the minds of many others. That Arnold himself, by reason of his aristocratic airs and occasional supercilious mannerisms, was not largely responsible for the existence of this legendary distortion of his individuality, cannot indeed be maintained; but it is evident that a very small amount of sympathetic study of his writings—an amount sufficient to take one below the surface and into the deep earnest undercurrent of his work—is enough to explode the vulgar myth and establish the reality once for all in its stead.

It is the highest praise that Arnold can find for Sophocles, “the mellow glory of the Attic stage,” that endowed with “even-balanced soul,” he “saw life steadily and saw it whole”;¹ as it is the highest praise that he can find for Goethe that he was strong “with a spirit free from mists and sane and clear.”² Such sentences

¹ Sonnet *To a Friend*—“Who prop, thou ask'st, in these bad days my mind?”

² *Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann.*

as these bring us directly upon the enduring purpose, the fixed and central aim, of Arnold's intellectual self-discipline. To see life steadily, and to see it whole; to preserve his mental and moral balance in the face of the most urgent and perplexing external conditions; to keep the atmosphere of his thought unobstructed by prejudices, premature judgments, figments of fancy, tricks of feeling, delusions of sense; such from first to last remained the dominant ideal of his entire career. The pursuit of such an ideal might mean the unlearning of much, the resignation of much;¹ it might force upon the unready shoulders a burden of heavy thought well-nigh too great to be borne; facile and comfortable doctrines of the older faith might in consequence have to be replaced by new conceptions which for the time being might well seem hard, gloomy, and uninspiring; but it was no business of the earnest truth-seeker to pause and count the cost of his undertaking. Reality must be had at any price. Without reality there could be no salvation.

Here, then, is the first point to be noted. In the case of Arnold, as in the case of Clough, we have to do with a man who will play no tricks upon himself, cherish no illusion, tolerate no special pleading—with a man whose prime business is with fact, and whose first question in regard to any new development of theory or

¹ See *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*, stanza 13.

practice will be, not is it pleasant, or comfortable, or easy, but is it true, is it right? "A man, finally, so deeply and evidently in earnest, filled with so awful a sense of the reality of things and of the madness of self-deception,"—in such words he characterizes Bishop Butler,¹ and in such words may we in turn characterize Arnold himself. And twice he quotes² from this same eighteenth-century thinker, and each time with openly expressed admiration, a sentence which may well be taken as the key to his own intellectual position. "Things are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why, then, should we desire to be deceived?" "In that uncompromising sentence," so runs his comment, "is surely the right and salutary maxim for both individuals and nations." In that uncompromising sentence certainly lay the accepted maxim of his own life.

To illustrate what we have above said by lengthy quotations from Arnold's numerous writings, would be to commit ourselves to an unnecessary expenditure of space; but a single reference may be made to sharpen those qualities in the man's intellectual make-up on which we here especially wish to insist. In one of his

¹ *Bishop Butler and the Zeitgeist* (*Last Essays on Church and Religion*, p. 237).

² In the essay just mentioned, and in the lecture on *Numbers*.

later essays, the study on Amiel and his journal (first published in 1877), we have an excellent opportunity of testing the fundamental lucidity and sanity of his mind. There was much in Amiel that he could revere; much also that seemed to him empty and unavailing; and in his personal estimation of what he found admirable and of what he found unsatisfactory we have the clearest declaration of his own attitude, outlook, and aims. He quotes sundry passages from the journal by way of exhibiting what admirers were accustomed to praise as Amiel's "speculative intuition," and of which the following only can be here reproduced as a sample:

"This psychological reinvolution is an anticipation of death; it represents the life beyond the grave, the return to Scheol, the soul fading into the world of ghosts or descending into the region of *Die Mütter*; it implies the simplification of the individual who, allowing all the accidents of personality to evaporate, exists henceforward only in the invisible state, the state of point, of potentiality, of pregnant nothingness. Is not this the true definition of mind? Is not mind, dissociated from space and time, just this? Its development, past or future, is contained in it just as a curve is contained in its algebraical formula. This nothing is an all. This *punctum* without dimensions is a *punctum salicis*."

Upon such a passage what is Arnold's criticism? "French critics throw up their hands in dismay at the violence which the Germanised Amiel, propounding his speculative philosophy, often does to the French language. My objection is rather that such speculative philosophy as that of which I have been quoting specimens, has no value, is perfectly futile. And Amiel's journal contains too much of it."

And now set over against these adverse comments upon what he finds futile and of no value in the journal, his entire endorsement of another aspect of Amiel's thought—his fortitude in confronting actuality, his high sense of the sanctity of fact. He quotes the following sentences:

"Pious fiction is still fiction. Truth has superior rights. The world must adapt itself to truth, not truth to the world. Copernicus upset the astronomy of the Middle Ages; so much the worse for the astronomy. The Everlasting Gospel is revolutionizing the churches; what does it matter?"

And his judgment is as significant as it is brief: "This is water to our mill, as the Germans say, indeed." Arnold's own position could hardly be more clearly defined. It is the position of a man whose aim is ever to see things as they really are; of a man who in the turmoil and restlessness of youth¹ clung to this

¹ See his interesting reference to this period in his essay on George Sand (*Mixed Essays*, pp. 241, 242).

purpose as his mainstay and guiding power; and who, in maturer years, when he came to write of the effects even now being wrought in the midst of our present-day world by that "one irresistible force . . . *the modern spirit*," could thus summarize his opinion of contemporary movements, and our own relation to them:

"Undoubtedly we are drawing on towards great changes; and for every nation the thing most needful is to discern clearly its own condition, in order to know in what particular way it may best meet them. Openness and flexibility of mind are at such a time the first of virtues. *Be ye perfect*, said the Founder of Christianity; *I count not myself to have apprehended*, said its greatest apostle. Perfection will never be reached, but to recognize a period of transformation when it comes, and to adapt themselves honestly and rationally to its laws, is perhaps the nearest approach to perfection of which men and nations are capable. No habits or attachments should prevent their trying to do this; nor indeed in the long run, can they. Human thought, which made all institutions, inevitably saps them, resting only in that which is absolute and eternal."¹

But now comes the question which, turn whither he would, haunted Arnold during his entire life; inability to answer which satisfactorily to himself lay at the root of his early

¹ *Democracy* (in *Mixed Essays*, p. 35).

hopelessness and unrest; while efforts to answer it in its various relations and bearings constituted the final cause of his later constructive work. Given all these changes in our nineteenth-century world—the widespread collapse of the ancient foundations of faith, the break-up of venerable institutions, the modification of long-fixed habits, the rise of entirely new social and industrial conditions—given all those facts which we have in mind when we speak of the incoming of the modern spirit—and how can we relate them “to our sense for conduct, to our sense for beauty”;¹ what, in other words, shall we say of them when we come to look at them from the standpoint of the spiritual man? Here, for Arnold, lay the ultimate problem, towards the solution of which all knowledge was to be regarded as merely subsidiary. Let us note carefully what he has to say in this connection about some of the new theories of science, and our need, sooner or later, of taking our emotional bearings in respect of them. He has been referring to Darwin’s discussion of the origin of man, and Huxley’s statement of the growth of our sense of law and order in nature; and he continues:

“Interesting, indeed, these results of science are, important they are, and we should all of us be acquainted with them. But what I now wish you to mark is, that we are still, when they

¹ *Literature and Science*, in *Discourses in America*, p. 103.

are propounded to us and we receive them, we are still in the sphere of intellect and knowledge. And for the generality of men there will be found, I say, to arise when they have duly taken in the proposition that their ancestor was 'a hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits,' there will be found to arise an invincible desire to relate this proposition to the sense in us for conduct, and to the sense in us for beauty. But this the men of science will not do for us, and will hardly even profess to do. They will give us other pieces of knowledge, other facts about other animals and their ancestors, or about plants or about stones, or about stars, and they may finally bring us to those great 'general conceptions of the universe, which are forced upon us all,' says Professor Huxley, 'by the progress of physical science.' But still it will be knowledge only which they give us; knowledge not put for us into relation with our sense for conduct, our sense for beauty, and touched with emotion by being so put; not thus put for us, and therefore, to the majority of mankind, after a certain while, unsatisfying, wearying."

And then, after a parenthetical discussion of the great mediæval universities and their aims, in answer to the strictures of Professor Huxley, he thus proceeds:

"But now, says Professor Huxley, concep-

tions of the universe fatal to the notions held by our forefathers have been forced upon us by physical science. Grant to him that they are thus fatal, that the new conceptions must and will soon become current everywhere, and that everyone will finally perceive them to be fatal to the beliefs of our forefathers. The need of humane letters, as they are truly called, because they serve the paramount desire in men that good should be forever present to them—the need of humane letters to establish a relation between the new conceptions and our instinct for beauty, our instinct for conduct, is only the more visible. The Middle Ages could do without humane letters, as it could do without the study of nature, because its supposed knowledge was made to engage its emotions so powerfully. Grant that the supposed knowledge disappears, its power of being made to engage the emotions will of course disappear along with it,—but the emotions themselves, and their claim to be engaged and satisfied, will remain. Now, if we find by experience that humane letters have an undeniable power of engaging the emotions, the importance of humane letters in a man's training becomes not less, but greater, in proportion to the success of modern science in extirpating what it calls 'mediæval thinking.'"¹

¹ *Literature and Science (Discourses in America)*, pp. 110-118.

Arnold's view of the value of humane letters in relating mere knowledge to our sense for conduct, our sense for beauty, may be found stated at length in the lecture from which these citations are made; into these matters of detail we cannot follow him now. What we here have to emphasize is the fact that the problems of modern life assumed always in his hands these ulterior forms. With him, as with Clough, a fine, lucid, intellectual nature was offset by a religious nature equally fine, equally strong, equally insistent. To see things as they are, knowing that we must adjust ourselves to reality, and that there is no madness comparable to the obstinacy of self-delusion, this, as we have seen, was the corner-stone, the firm foundation-principle of his thought. But as he has just told us, the emotional part of our nature insists upon its claim to be engaged and satisfied; it is permanent and urgent; nor, save in its full and adequate satisfaction, can any lasting happiness be found. Hence, the supreme question—How will the modern spirit and its results in life and thought affect this permanent and urgent part of our nature?

And now we are in a position to understand that the unrest and dejection of Arnold's poetry, like the unrest and dejection of Clough's poetry, find their explanation for us in the writer's inability to relate the changing

dispensation of the civilized world to his imperative sense for conduct and for beauty—or, as we should put it, in his inability to translate the outworkings of the modern spirit into terms of the spiritual life. The attitude of evasion adopted by Keats and Rossetti, the solutions offered by Newman and Carlyle,¹ were for him impossible; but during the period of which his verse is the record, the weight of the world's problems bore all the more heavily upon his mind. The brain was steady, but the heart was not at peace. His life was thus shaken at its foundations; and uncertainty, sadness, the feeling of loss, craving, and futility, became the ever-recurring themes of nearly all his song.

III.

It has been pointed out by Mr. Stedman,² that in Matthew Arnold we have an "instance of an introspective nature overcoming the purpose formed by critical judgment." In other words, Arnold's poetic genius and creed were in direct conflict, and the former fortunately won the day. For a distinct statement of his theoretical position we have but to go back to the memorable preface to the second edition of his earlier poems, published in 1854. Trained

¹ See what he says of Newman at the beginning, and of Carlyle towards the close, of his lecture on Emerson.

² *The Nature and Elements of Poetry*, pp. 133-36.

in the school of Goethe and the Greeks, he there definitely enunciates his belief that objective art alone possesses permanent value, that human action yields the one fitting material for the muse. Subjective poetry—the poetry of self-expression—is, as such, upon a lower plane of production. Art must be preferred to ourselves. And since modern verse is coming to be marked and marred by ever-increasing subjectivity, the one safe course for the writer of to-day is to hold fast to the ancients, and discipline himself upon the models furnished by their characteristic works.

It was in accordance with this theory that most of Arnold's more ambitious poems were produced—the heroic episodes of *Balder Dead* and *Sohrab and Rustum*, and the romantic story of *Tristram and Iscult*. It cannot be maintained that in any one of these productions the author scores a thorough and decided success. Certainly the last-named work is the very reverse of successful; while, as for the others, we entirely endorse Mr. Stedman's judgment when he describes them as "*tours de force* of intellect and constructive taste." Beautiful as they are in their way, with their painstaking polish, their limpidity of diction, their sculpturesque clearness of outline, they none the less serve to show us that under the influence of a carefully-considered critical theory, Arnold deliberately placed himself in a

by-way of experiment which, consistently followed, would have led to the practical nullification of his true genius and power. Working in the direction which he had thus mapped out for himself, he produced poems of a high order of merit—poems marked by skill, delicate art, distinction; but nevertheless, scholar's work, academic, rather laborious, and deficient in spontaneity, vitality, the "note of the inevitable." With such offerings as these, Arnold would surely have gained repute; but his interest for us, for the large majority of readers of poetry, would after all have been a narrow one. He certainly would not have become what a graceful and discriminating critic has pronounced him to be, "to those who care for him at all . . . the most useful poet of his day."¹

It was fortunate therefore, as we have said, that though by theory wedded to the ideals of objective art, Arnold in practice allowed his temperament for the most part to have free play, for his really successful poetry belongs to the school he condemned—the school of reserved yet thoroughly honest self-delineation. *Balder Dead* and *Sohrab and Rustum* will always secure sympathetic and appreciative readers among the studious class; but it is by reason, not of these works, but of poems like *Dover Beach*, the *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*, *Buried Life*, *Kensington Gardens*, and

¹ Augustine Birrell, *Res Judicatae*, p. 192.

others belonging to the same general category—poems full of reflection, and throughout highly personal—that Arnold holds his place unmistakably among the representative poets of our century.

We get nearer to the really vital element, the true governing principle of Arnold's verse, when we turn from his early manifesto concerning the canons of art to his later discussions of the aims and objects of poetry. Everyone is familiar with his famous and much canvassed definition of literature at large as criticism of life, and of poetry in particular as "a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty"—a definition which, as has been well said, itself stands in need of a good deal of defining. Equally familiar is his often reiterated affirmation of the high place, power, and destiny of poetry, as when for instance he writes—"In poetry . . . the spirit of our race will find . . . as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay."¹ Arnold indeed was never weary of insisting that poetry is to be rightly held as a profoundly earnest, important, and enduring thing, and that it is to poetry that mankind will more and more have to turn "to interpret life for us, to console, to sustain us."² Poetry for him was

¹ *The Study of Poetry* (in *Essays in Criticism*, 2d Series, p. 5).

² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

"nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth."¹ Such was his theory of the meaning and obligations of poetry, and his own practice was consistently in harmony with it. That poetry should be characterized by the "noble and profound application of ideas to life";² that it should be moral in the largest and deepest sense of that rather uncertain term;³ that it should deal directly with life,⁴ which is itself three parts made up of conduct; and that it should be based on sound and substantial subject-matter;⁵ such were the cardinal principles of his doctrine of poetry. And by strict and conscientious adherence to such principles Arnold's own poetic production is everywhere distinguished. His verse contains

¹ *Wordsworth* (in *Essays in Criticism*, 2d Series, p. 126).

² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁵ Instance Arnold's attitude towards Shelley, the "incurable want" in whose poetry he holds to be the want of "a sound subject-matter," with its consequent fault of unsubstantiality (*Wordsworth*, in *Essays*, 2d series, p. 165); and compare the entire essay on Shelley in the same volume, with its famous description of that poet as a "beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain." It will be remembered also that Arnold expressed dissatisfaction with Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode*, because its central idea, though "of undeniable beauty as a play of fancy," had not "the character of poetic truth of the best kind"—that is, it had "no real solidity."

a "noble and profound application of ideas to life"; it is largely and deeply moral; its dominant note is the note of conduct; its final question, the question how to live; its subject-matter throughout eminently sound and substantial.

Thus in spite of all theories concerning the enduring value of objective art, and the relative worthlessness of poetry of the self-delineative order; in spite of his long training in the discipline of the Greeks, and his immense and often expressed admiration of their works, Arnold was the last to pretend that the present hour, with its new needs and its new ideals, could ever find satisfaction in lifeless imitations of the great efforts of the past. He believed, indeed, that, compared with the Greek poets from Pindar to Sophocles, all other writers fall short:—"No other poets," he declared, "have lived so much by the imaginative reason; no other poets have made their works so well balanced; no other poets have so well satisfied the thinking power, have so well satisfied the religious sense"; he believed, therefore, that these writers remain of permanent service and significance for all generations. Yet he distinctly disclaimed any desire to set them up "as objects of blind worship"; and just as distinctly maintained that "the present has to make its own poetry, and not even Sophocles and his compeers, any more than Dante and

Shakespeare are enough for it.”¹ Hence we detect in all his best and truest verse the characteristically modern note. One thing that attracted him especially about Marcus Aurelius was the fact that Marcus Aurelius lived and labored in a state of society modern in its essential features, “in an epoch akin to our own.”² In this way the pagan emperor was found to possess immense superiority of interest over a man like St. Louis. “St. Louis inhabits an atmosphere of mediæval Catholicism, which the man of the nineteenth century may admire, indeed, may even passionately wish to inhabit, but which, strive as he will, he cannot really inhabit.” Arnold’s nature had too strong a hold upon the real and the practical, to allow him to make any attempt to naturalize himself as a citizen of the past world. If he could write, “the future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, when it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay,”³ he could do so by reason of his deep-rooted faith in the fundamental and vital relation of true poetry to men’s actual every-day life. The poetry of the present, to be alive, to be real, must therefore grow out of the present, and be fed by its multifari-

¹ *Pagan and Mediæval Religious Sentiment* (in *Essays in Criticism*, 1st Series, pp. 221-22).

² *Marcus Aurelius* (in *Essays in Criticism*, 1st Series, p. 355).

³ *The Study of Poetry* (in *Essays*, 2d. Series, p. 1).

ous streams of thought and feeling ; and that part of the production of Arnold himself which is secure of immortality—the part in which “our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay,” is the part in which he has allowed his genius and his temperament to take their natural unimpeded course.

IV.

If there is one poem more than all others in which Arnold may be said to have given us a key to his position, and at the same time to have shown us how acutely that position was realized by him, it is assuredly the splendid *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*—a production which, indeed, can hardly be read too often or too carefully as an exposition of the spiritual conditions of the man and his time. Here the poet finds himself, in a “showery twilight gray,” a visitor “to the Carthusians’ world-famed home”; and we notice at once that Arnold’s interest in the old forms and faiths of the Middle Ages is something very different from the interest of Rossetti. Mediæval catholicism appealed to the great Pre-Raphaelite master upon the imaginative or æsthetic side ; he loved it for its beauty, its warmth, its picturesqueness, its romantic associations. Arnold, on the other hand, was pre-occupied with and absorbed in the purely reli-

gious element—the faith and hope out of which this ancient Carthusian brotherhood had grown, and for which it had so long stood as a visible and palpable symbol. He expressly lingers over every detail of the austerity of the ascetic life upon which he has so suddenly come out of the tumultuous and restless activity of his own modern world. He describes for us “the silent courts,” the “humid corridors,” the “cowl’d forms” brushing by “ghost-like in the deepening night”; “the chapel where no organ’s peal invests the stern and naked prayer”; the cells with their knee-worn floors; the wooden beds, presently to become the coffins of their occupants. Such a picture contains little indeed to arouse the interest or fire the imagination of a man of Rossetti’s temper; but with Arnold it is different. His quick eye pierces to the heart of this strange, alien life; he is thrown inward upon himself at the magnetic touch of a faith which, no matter how meaninglessly hideous and grotesque and perverted may now seem its embodiments, was once full of vital and saving value. Then it is that he directly questions himself, asking what he can have to do in such a “living tomb.” Is not his presence there itself conclusive evidence of his want of loyalty to those “rigorous teachers” who had seized his youth, and at whose behests he had long ago “so much unlearned, so much resigned”? But he answers with an

emphatic No. He is interested in the monastery and its inmates as a Greek might have been interested when, on some far northern strand, he lighted unexpectedly upon a "fallen Runic stone":—"for both were faiths, and both are gone." And then come the solemn and impressive stanzas in which Arnold deliberately defines his position :

"Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,¹
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these on earth I wait forlorn.
Their faith, my tears, the world deride—
I come to shed them at their side.

"Oh, hide me in your gloom profound,
Ye solemn seats of holy pain !
Take me, cowl'd forms, and fence me round,
Till I possess my soul again.
Till free my thoughts before me roll,
Not chafed by hourly false control."

Why then—to put for ourselves the question which forced itself upon the poet's own mind—why, then, does Arnold linger among the shadows and traditions of the old Carthusian monastery—he a skeptic of the later times, for whom the beliefs and aspirations of the Middle

¹ Compare the almost identical phrase in the stanzas *Obermann Once More* :

"But now the old is out of date,
The new is not yet born."

Ages are dead beyond all possibility of resuscitation? The answer is simple. It is because he is seeking vainly for the spiritual comfort which all the while he knows he can never find either in the old creed, because he has outgrown it, or in the new thought, because he has not yet emotionally appropriated it. After all that has been accomplished in the past, the pangs that tortured our fathers remain as an inheritance to us, their sons; and neither by the "haughty scorn" of Byron, nor by the "lovely wail" of Shelley, nor by the stern sad moralizing of Senancour, has the world been enriched with the means of lasting hope and salvation. Hence, though the poet may cling to some faith in the future, his thought concerning his own generation rises but little above the dull level of absolute despair.

"Years hence, perhaps, may dawn an age,
 More fortunate, alas ! than we,
 Which without hardness will be sage,
 And gay without frivolity.
 Sons of the world, oh, speed those years ;
 But, while we wait, allow our tears !

"Allow them ! we admire with awe
 The exulting thunder of your race ;
 You give the universe your law,
 You triumph over time and space !
 Your pride of life, your tireless powers,
 We laud them, but they are not ours.

"We are like children rear'd in shade
Beneath some old-world abbey wall,
Forgotten in a forest-glade,
And secret from the eyes of all.
Deep, deep the greenwood round them waves,
Their abbey, and its close of graves !"

Along with this highly personal and characteristic poem should be read the equally personal and characteristic *Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann*, dated November, 1849. To the subtle and potent influence of Senancour upon his earlier thought, Arnold again and again bore witness, and in the verses now referred to, he speaks frankly as a disciple to the spirit of a master. He declares that among the thinkers who had arisen "in this our troubled day," three only, as he believed, had seen their pathway clear before them—Goethe, Wordsworth, and Senancour himself; and as Wordsworth fails us, because he deliberately averted his eyes "from half of human fate," and Goethe, because his serene and splendid course was one which in the nature of things "few sons of men may think to emulate"; we turn to the "sadder sage," Obermann, and con the lesson of his strangely fascinating pages, knowing that he, too, has probed deeply into "the hopeless tangle" of our time. And what, then, is the solution offered by Senancour, and how does Arnold respond to his message

of deliverance? Senancour can suggest only one way of escape, and that is by flight to the desert ;¹ and for Arnold, such an abandonment of the struggle of the modern world is, like Newman's retreat into the bosom of the Catholic Church, "frankly speaking, impossible."²

"To thee we come, then ! clouds are roll'd
When thou, O seer ! art set ;
Thy realm of thought is drear and cold—
The world is colder yet !

"And thou hast pleasures, too, to share
With those who come to thee—
Balms floating on thy mountain-air,
And healing sights to see.

"How often, when the slopes are green
On Jaman, hast thou sate
By some high chalet-door, and seen
The summer day grow late ;

"And darkness steal o'er the wet grass
With the pale crocus starr'd
And reach that glimmering sheet of glass
Beneath the piny sward,

¹ Compare the words put into Senancour's mouth in *Obermann Once More* :

"Then to the wilderness I fled—
There among Alpine snows
And pastoral huts I hid my head,
And sought and found repose."

² The solution offered by Empedocles—that of suicide—is similarly "impossible" ; highly personal as much of the poem must be taken to be.

“Lake Leman’s waters, far below !
And watch’d the rosy light
Fade from the distant peaks of snow ;
And on the air of night

“Heard accents of the eternal tongue
Through the pine branches play—
Listen’d, and felt thyself grow young !
Listen’d and wept—”

It is a seductive picture, this of the quietude and placidity of the anchorite’s life. The spell of its peace and beauty is upon the poet as he lingers over its entrancing details. But suddenly, his healthier nature asserts itself, and the charm snaps.

“Away !
Away the dreams that but deceive
And thou, sad guide, adieu !
I go, fate drives me ; but I leave
Half of my life with you.

“We, in some unknown Power’s employ,
Move on a rigorous line ;
Can neither, when we will, enjoy,
Nor, when we will, resign.

“I in the world must live ; but thou,
Thou melancholy shade !
Wilt not, if thou canst see me now,
Condemn me, nor upbraid.”

Arnold, then, finds it impossible to follow Senancour to his mountain hermitage, and to

seek relief from the pressure of modern difficulties by systematically ignoring their power. Yet returning to practical existence he carries with him the stoical inspiration to live his life in action, as Senancour had lived his in silence and seclusion—keeping himself “unspotted by the world.”

“There without anger thou wilt see
 Him who obeys thy spell
 No more, so he but rest like thee
 Unsoil'd !—and so farewell.”

In both of these poems it is impossible not to be struck by the sense of transition which for the time being dominates the poet's thought. Arnold knows that he has fallen upon an era of change, that, in his own words, he is a wanderer between a world that is dead, and a world that is not yet born. This point will be made more clear for us if we remember that in his interpretation of human destiny Arnold really represents a stage of doubt and uncertainty between the revolutionary faith of Shelley, upon the one hand, and the evolutionary faith of Tennyson and Browning upon the other. The singer of *The Revolt of Islam* and *Prometheus Unbound* could project himself imaginatively into the after-times of mankind, in the firm belief that “if only men throw off their shackles, and assert their perfect freedom of thought and action, there is reserved for them a dazzling

future, in which there will be no war, no crimes, no government, no disease, anguish, melancholy, or resentment. Human life will be indefinitely extended through the growing power of mind over matter and propagation and death will cease together."¹ Such, indeed, was the faith by which all the poets of the revolution had been kindled through the rich and glowing promises of the early period of continental enthusiasm; it was, moreover, a faith to which, as we have seen, Shelley himself clung tenaciously, long after the reaction in thought had set in, sweeping everything before it. Before Arnold's time, the belief of the French doctrinaires and their English disciples, in the rapid and continuous amelioration of men's lot on earth, had passed away like an opium-eater's dream, and a period of cynicism, apathy, and moral exhaustion had succeeded—a period of which Senancour had been one of the most eloquent exponents and of which Arnold, as he himself confesses, had "felt all the spell, and traversed all the shade."² But meanwhile the old thought of progress had been taking fresh form through the influence of the rising school of evolutionary thinkers, who sought to substitute for the exploded notion of lasting

¹ This summary of Godwin's doctrine of human perfectibility, as given by Mr. Sully in his *Pessimism*, Chap. iii., will apply equally well to the creed of his disciple and poetic interpreter.

² *Obermann Once More*.

betterment through catastrophe, the cardinal thought of gradual unfolding and development. "In Comtism the doctrine of historical progress received a new expression"; while "once more through the new doctrine of evolution as expounded by Mr. Darwin, and especially by Mr. Herbert Spencer, the modern mind has grown habituated in anticipating an indefinite expansion of human capacity in the future."¹ Of this new and pregnant suggestion of slow and orderly growth Tennyson had already become the great poetic apostle. But to Arnold, in the years of his young manhood, the new gospel did not yield its open secret. He came too late to share in the ardor of the revolutionists; the milder but more solid promises by which the evolutionists undertook to renew the faith of the world, he also failed to realize. Thus it was that by his own admission so much of his earlier poetry was weighted down by the feeling of *Weltschmerz* and collapse, repeating, though in a less clamorous way, the minor melodies of the post-revolutionary school.

It should of course be noted that Arnold's despairing utterances gain added force and significance from their striking contrast with the average, rather superficial and easy-going, optimism of his day. "My melancholy, sciolists say, is a pass'd mode, an outworn theme."²

¹ Sully, *op. cit.*, Chap. iii.

² *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse.*

The English world at large had long since thrown off the apathetic mood induced by the experiences of the earlier part of the century, and its temper was now unusually sanguine and self-satisfied. Men of the most diverse schools of thought were accustomed to point with undisguised enthusiasm to all the material advantages enjoyed by the period in which they lived. Professor Dowden admirably summarizes the general feeling of the time when he writes: "The ten-pound householder had his vote; slavery was abolished in the colonies; the evils of pauperism were met by a poor law; the bread-tax was abolished; the people were advancing in education; useful knowledge was made accessible in cheap publications; a man could travel forty miles in the time in which his father could have travelled ten; more iron, more coal was dug out of the earth; more wheels were whirling, more shuttles flew, more looms rattled, more cotton was spun, more cloth was sold. The statistics of progress were surely enough to intoxicate with joy a lover of his species."¹ Given such facts, and where, in truth, could there be any grounds for dissatisfaction? Such was the question which found indignant expression in the writings of men like Macaulay, in whom the shallow self-complacency of the time found a ready and vigorous spokes-

¹ *Victorian Literature* (in *Transcripts and Studies*, pp. 162-63.

man;¹ such was the question which, never without calling forth its due meed of popular applause, came from the orators of the hustings throughout the length and breadth of the land; such was the question which, in one or another form, was continually on the lips of middle-class liberals, and gave the text for many a vigorous homily in the newspapers and reviews devoted to the progressive cause. Yet amid all this astonishing material prosperity, amid all this clatter and bustle of advance, amid all the cheap and windy rhetoric of the Philistines, and their wholesale denunciation of sentimentalism and the transcendental, there were a few incompatibles, a remnant from the grand majority, who still refused to believe that everything was as well as it appeared, a few dissident voices raised in warning or reproach. Of these voices Arnold's was one. With a manner about as unlike that of the Sage of Chelsea as any manner well could be, our own poet nevertheless undertook to remind the great British public, as for more than fifty years Carlyle persistently reminded it, that this astonishing material prosperity of which it made boast was hiding from its vision issues of infinitely more vital importance, and that by reason of its sanguine temper and superficial methods of judgment,

¹ See, *e.g.*, his essay on Southey's *Colloquies of Society*, and the concluding paragraphs of the famous third chapter of his *History*.

it was in danger of substituting false for true standards of national prosperity and individual development.

No reader of Arnold's prose work needs to be reminded of the constant appeal from material to spiritual canons made in the pages of *Culture and Anarchy*, and of many of the writer's minor essays; or of the delicate satire and pungent wit with which so many of the conventional doctrines of a mechanical age were dissected and laid bare. Already in his poetry he had turned away from "the barren optimistic sophistries" of the "comfortable moles" of his generation, from the shallow materialism, and facile self-confidence so characteristic of the time, and had asserted as the final test of development the criterion of spiritual growth. In one poem, in particular, the verses entitled *Progress*, the thought of what constitutes real, as contradistinguished from merely superficial advance, is very clearly set forth.

"Say ye : ' The spirit of man has found new roads,
And we must leave the old faiths, and walk there-
in ' ?

Leave then the Cross as ye have left carved gods,
But guard the fire within !

.....
" Children of men ! the unseen Power, whose eye
For ever doth accompany mankind,
Hath look'd on no religion scornfully
That men did ever find.

“ Which has not taught weak wills how much they
can ?

Which has not fallen on the dry heart like rain ?

Which has not cried to sunk, self-weary man :

Thou must be born again !

“ Children of men ! not that your age excel

In pride of life the ages of your sires,

But that ye think clear, feel deep, bear fruit well,

The Friend of man desires.”

Indeed, so fundamentally important, so profoundly and essentially needful, did this element of the higher life in man always seem to Arnold to be, that he was tempted to prefer any creed which would help to hold intact the tiniest germ of such spiritual vitality to the negativism which, in its scheme of human existence, contentedly left the divine unrecognized and uncared for altogether. This comes out strongly in a little poem, which is all the more interesting because its momentary petulance is in such curious contrast with the writer's usual urbanity and self-composure.

“ ‘ Man is blind because of sin,
Revelation makes him sure ;
Without that, who looks within,
Looks in vain, for all 's obscure.’

“ Nay, look closer into man !
Tell me, can you find indeed
Nothing sure, no moral plan
Clear prescribed, without your creed ?

“ ‘ No, I nothing can perceive !
 Without that, all 's dark for men.
 That, or nothing, I believe.’—
 For God’s sake, believe it then ! ” ¹

It is in the light of these considerations that Arnold’s most hopeless and forlorn utterances have to be interpreted. It was the thought that, by reason of its pre-occupation with material things, the modern world was virtually losing its hold upon the unseen realities of the spirit, that filled him with apprehension and dejection. In *Bacchanalia, or The New Age*—a poem which in its introductory lines contains perhaps the most perfect bit of natural description to be found anywhere in the writer’s verse—he dwells with severity upon the noise and turbulence, the extravagance and irreverence of the time, and explains why the poet’s voice is not raised to swell the chorus of universal self-glorification ; while in *Dover Beach*—a production which, with wonderfully sustained verbal felicity, gives expression to his most despairing mood—he bewails the gradual breaking-away of the faith which had yielded life and stimulus to the generations of the past.

“ The Sea of Faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle fur’d,
 But now I only hear

¹ *Pis-Aller.*

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world."

But the utter and unrelieved despair, here so finely distilled in melody, did not enter as a permanent factor into the disposition of Arnold's mind. The mood of *Dover Beach* was a mood above which, even in his poetic production, Arnold became more and more able to soar. While still seeking in verse the medium of his criticism of life, and before he had yet definitely committed himself to the constructive prose efforts which were to signalize his general change of temper and outlook, he had reached a point of view from which the world and its problems appeared to him under a somewhat more favorable light. In *The Future*—a poem written in the irregular unrhymed verse which he frequently essayed, and more successfully here than in most of his other similar adventures—he sets forth his faith in the gradual ordering of things to finer issues than the present may seem to indicate, in a very definite way. In this nobly conceived and splendidly sustained allegory, the history of humanity is traced out under the figure of a mighty, ever-flowing stream. Man is a wanderer from his birth, and as he glides down the current of existence, he is fain to look now backwards, now forwards, and dream

“Of the lands which the river of Time
Had left ere he woke on its breast,
Or shall reach when his eyes have been closed.”

No one can hope to see the green earth on the banks of the stream as it looked to those who came from the virgin country nearer the source. In verses which recall Clough's constant yearning for a simpler and less sophisticated relation with the world than is possible to most of us to-day, Arnold tells us that no maiden now can read into her bosom as clearly as Rebekah read into her's as she sat at eventide by the palm-shaded well, and no bard can have such a near and high vision of God as came to Moses, as he lay in the night by his flock, on the star-lit Arabian waste. So much we have to regret—the fine and pure freshness, the spontaneity, the zest and joyousness of earlier life, have for ever passed from our view.

“This tract which the river of Time
Now flows through with us is the plain.
Gone is the calm of its earlier shore,
Border'd by cities and hoarse
With a thousand cries is its stream.
And we on its breast, our minds
Are confused as the cries which we hear,
Changing and shot as the sights which we see.”

There are moments, therefore, when it is only too natural that we should feel that the old re-

pose has fled ; that the din and confusion of life will increase as the years go by ; that peace and quietude will come not to us again. Yet the future may after all hold better things in store for us than we are sometimes apt to anticipate. For

“ Haply, the river of Time—
 As it grows, as the towns on its marge
 Fling their wavering lights
 On the wider, statelier stream—
 May acquire, if not the calm
 Of its early mountainous shore,
 Yet a solemn peace of its own.
 And the width of the waters, the hush
 Of the grey expanse where he floats,
 Freshening the current and spotted with foam,
 As it draws to the ocean, may strike
 Peace to the soul of the man on its breast,—
 As the pale waste widens around him,
 As the banks fade dimmer away,
 As the stars come out, and the night-wind
 Brings up the stream
 Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea.”

The second stanzas to Senancour—*Obermann Once More*—contain an even distincter enunciation of Arnold's more sanguine thought ; and they are especially valuable to the student by reason of the clearness with which in them he defines his position, and emphasizes the grounds of the faith that is in him. The immediate oc-

casion of the production was a second visit paid by the writer, many years after his first, to the Alpine scenes rendered dear to him by association with the memory of his early teacher; and the greater part of the poem is made up of verses put by Arnold into Senancour's mouth for the purpose of bringing out the shifting conditions of the modern world, and the fresh hope that may well come to us all from the careful study of them in contrast with the immediate past. This long speech, with its broad and fine interpretation of history, opens with the splendid and often quoted description of Roman civilization just before the rise of Christianity, and of the tremendous and far-reaching changes wrought by the influence of the new religion. Following the course of the ages, Senancour is then made to portray the gradual decline of living faith, and the sapping of the creeds upon which the hope of the older generations had been founded; with the consequent slow but certain lapse of mankind into formalisms, moral sterility, and despair. There needed, then, some vast new stimulus to rive the dry bones of society, "and with new force a new-sprung world inform." Then the crisis of the revolution came. The worn-out cosmos of the older order, which Senancour and his contemporaries had known so well, crashed into ruins. And with what result?

“ The sun shone in the new-wash’d sky,
 And what from heaven saw he ?
 Blocks of the past, like icebergs high,
 Float on a rolling sea ! ”

What, then, was the condition of things by which Senancour’s generation had found itself confronted ?

“ The past, its mask of union on,
 Had ceased to live and thrive.
 The past, its mask of union gone,
 Say, is it more alive ?

“ Your creeds are dead, your rites are dead,
 Your social order too !
 Where tarries he, the Power who said :
 See, I make all things new ?

“ The millions suffer still, and grieve,
 And what can helpers heal
 With old-world cures men half believe
 For woes they wholly feel ?

“ And yet men have such need of joy !
 But joy whose grounds are true ;
 And joy that should all hearts employ
 As when the past was new.

“ Ah, not the emotion of that past,
 Its common hope, were vain !
 Some new such hope must dawn at last,
 Or man must toss in pain.

“ But now the old is out of date,
The new is not yet born,
And who can be *alone* elate,
While the world lies forlorn ? ”

Senancour then refers to his own baffled career, and consequent flight to the wilderness of Alpine snows—an abandonment of the world-problem in which, as we have already seen, Arnold for his own part found it impossible to follow his teacher. But, as the visionary speaker goes on to declare, many changes have come to pass since he, Senancour, had been called upon to lay down the burden of his “frustrate life”; and the men of the new generation need no longer be crushed down by the despondency and prostration of soul which had proved the inevitable portion of their fathers. And so Senancour’s long address closes with a stimulating appeal to the young poet to throw aside his inertness and despair, and, inspired by fresh hope himself, to carry such hope out into the expectant world.

“ Despair not thou as I despair’d,
Nor be cold gloom thy prison !
Forward the gracious hours have fared,
And see ! the sun is risen !

“ He breaks the winter of the past ;
A green new earth appears.
Millions, whose life in ice lay fast,
Have thoughts, and smiles, and tears.

“What though there still need effort, strife?

Though much be still unwon?

Yet warm it mounts, the hour of life!

Death's frozen hour is gone!

“The world's great order dawns in sheen,

After long darkness rude,

Divinelier imaged, clearer seen,

With happier zeal pursued.

“With hope extinct and brow composed,

I mark'd the present die;

Its term of life was nearly closed,

Yet it had more than I.

“But thou, though to the world's new hour

Thou come with aspect marr'd,

Shorn of the joy, the bloom, the power

Which best befits its bard—

“Though more than half thy years be past,

And spent thy youthful prime;

Though, round thy firmer manhood cast,

Hang weeds of our sad time

“Whereof thy youth felt all the spell,

And traversed all the shade—

Though late, though dimm'd, though weak, yet tell

Hope to a world new-made!

“Help it to fill that deep desire,

The want that rack'd our brain,

Consum'd our heart with thirst like fire,

Immedicable pain;

“ Which to the wilderness drove out
Our life, to Alpine snow,
And palsied all our word with doubt,
And all our work with woe—

“ What still of strength is left, employ
That end to help attain :
One common wave of thought and joy
Lifting mankind again ! ”

The vision ends ; but outside nature seems to take up its cheering influences. The poet, awaking as from sleep, gazes out across “ Sonchaud’s piny flanks ” and the “ blanch’d summit bare of Malatrait,” and behold, the dawn of a new day greets him. For

“ Glorious there without a sound
Across the glimmering lake,
High in the Valais-depth profound,
I saw the morning break ! ”

V.

To complete this slight sketch of Arnold’s work as a poet, it remains to speak in brief of two distinctive features of his verse—his intense feeling for nature, and his unvarying insistence upon the supremacy of conduct and duty. These familiar characteristics must detain us for a moment, inasmuch as they are both vitally related to his general philosophy of life, discussed in the foregoing pages.

In his treatment of nature Arnold comes before us as a close follower of one of his acknowledged spiritual masters, Wordsworth, to the inspiration, and especially to the "healing power" of whose poetry, he more than once bore emphatic testimony.

"He spoke, and loosed our hearts in tears.
 He laid us, as we lay at birth
 On the cool flowery lap of earth,
 Smiles broke from us, and we had ease ;
 The hills were round us, and the breeze
 Went o'er the sunlit fields again ;
 Our foreheads felt the wind and rain.
 Our youth return'd for there was shed
 On spirits that had long been dead,
 Spirits dried up and closely furl'd,
 The freshness of the early world.¹"

In these lines he indicates to us the particular nature of the influence which he realized had been exercised over his life by him whom he elsewhere speaks of as "a priest to us all of the wonder and bloom of the world."²

With Wordsworth as his guide, then, Arnold sought in nature a temporary refuge from the "doubts, disputes, distractions, fears," of his own "iron time" ; and in communion with her he found not only relief, but also a soothing, consoling, and uplifting power.

¹ *Memorial Verses*, 1850.

² *The Youth of Nature*—a poem which should be read along with the *Memorial Verses*.

"Apollo !

What mortal could be sick or sorry here ?"

exclaims Callicles, resting on a pathway-rock in the forest region of Etna, in the gracious hour of early dawn ; and we know that the words are inspired by the poet's own experience of many such an escape made from the heat and turmoil of the world to scenes like these that the young harp-player describes.¹ How closely and sympathetically he lived with nature, with what loving and attentive glance his eye marked the changing of the seasons, the alternations of day and night, of shower and sunshine, there is scarcely a page of his verse that does not show. He felt little indeed of the weird charm of the ruder aspects of sea and crag and sky, for his muse was after all more urban than his master's, and "the deep authentic mountain-thrill" seldom, if ever, "shook his page."² But that within the boundaries imposed by his temperamental limitations, his nature-poetry is of the rarest excellence, no reader of *Thyrsis* and *The Scholar Gypsy* needs to be told.

It is to be noted that in Arnold's case the so-called moral indifference of nature to man's joys and sufferings, instead of jarring upon the feelings or disturbing the mind, becomes an additional influence in turning his spirit nature-

¹ *Empedocles on Etna*, Act i., Scene 1.

² William Watson, *In Laleham Churchyard*.

ward. What others gird against as the inscrutable, unresponsive insensibility, the inflexible regularity, of cosmic things, he, on the contrary, finds, not oppressive or overwhelming, but full of subtle stimulus and meaning. An appeal, direct, potent, irresistibly, is made by them to the largely-developed stoical element in his own character. To emulate nature in this respect—to possess one's own soul in quietude despite the storm and turmoil, the conflicts and alarms outside—thus becomes one of his moral ideals.¹ He revered Goethe for his insight into the "weltering strife" of his epoch, and for his corresponding power of so far detaching himself from "the lurid flow of terror and insane distress, and headlong fate" as to preserve unjeopardized his own spiritual equanimity.² In nature he seemed to find not only the calmness and repose for which he yearned, but also a majestic serenity and composure in admirable contrast with the fret and fume, the hurry and worry of our own little bewildered human lives. Thus he could write, touching deftly upon the poet's sensitiveness and endowment of large vision :

" Before him he sees life unroll,
A placid and continuous whole—

¹ See, for example, *Resignation, Self-Dependence, Quiet Work, Religious Isolation, Morality*. The well-known conclusion of *Sohrab and Rustum* is interesting in this connection.

² *Memorial Verses*, 1850.

That general life which does not cease,
 Whose secret is not joy but peace ;
 That life whose dumb wish is not miss'd
 If birth proceed, if things subsist ;
 The life of plants and stones and rain,
 The life he craves—if not in vain
 Fate gave, what chance shall not control,
 His sad lucidity of soul. ”

And, again, at the close of the same poem :

“ Enough, we live !—and if a life,
 With large results so little rife,
 Though bearable, seem hardly worth
 This pomp of worlds, this pain of birth ;
 Yet, Fausta, the mute turf we tread,
 The solemn hills around us spread,
 This stream which falls incessantly,
 The strange-scraw'd rocks, the lonely sky,
 If I might lend their heart a voice,
 Seem to bear rather than rejoice.
 And even could the intemperate prayer
 Man iterates, while these forbear,
 For movement, for an ampler sphere,
 Pierce Fate's impenetrable ear ;
 Not milder is the general lot
 Because our spirits have forgot,
 In action's dizzying eddy whirl'd,
 The something that infects the world.” ¹

And yet, once more, in that beautiful little
 suburban idyl, the *Lincs Written in Kensington*
Gardens :

¹ *Resignation.*

" In the huge world which roars hard by,
 Be others happy if they can !
 But in my helpless cradle I
 Was breathed on by the rural Pan.

" I, on men's impious uproar hurl'd,
 Think often, as I hear them rave,
 That peace has left the upper world,
 And now keeps only in the grave.

" Yet here is peace for ever new !
 When I who watch them am away,
 Still all things in this glade go through
 The changes of their quiet day.

" Calm soul of all things ! make it mine
 To feel, amid the city's jar,
 That there abides a peace of thine,
 Man did not make and cannot mar.

" The will to neither strive nor cry,
 The power to feel with others give !
 Calm, calm me more, nor let me die
 Before I have begun to live. "

In regard to the second point above referred to—the dominance of the ethical note in Arnold's work—little needs here to be said. Whatever may be our individual relation to the man's life and thought, we are bound to regard Arnold as the ideal teacher—as the poet who, beyond all others of his generation, accepted it

as his special mission to keep the standard of duty unfurled upon the battlements of song. For him, conduct was the supreme, the ever-imperious word. It constituted the one central and abiding theme to which, no matter what might be the immediate topic engaging his attention, he always returned with the same steady insistence, the same fine insight, the same lofty and uncompromising purpose.

To Arnold, human life in its higher developments presented itself as a stern and strenuous affair. The many might choose to abandon themselves, like fools of chance, to the current of outward circumstance, and trust to fate to bring them safely through¹; for

“ Most men eddy about
Here and there—eat and drink
Chatter, and love, and hate,
Gather and squander, are raised
Aloft, are hurl'd in the dust,
Striving blindly, achieving
Nothing ; and then they die.”²

He, however, belonged to those others—the small minority—

¹ “ We do not what we ought,
What we ought not we do,
And lean upon the thought
That chance will bring us through.”

Empedocles on Etna, Act i., Scene 2.

² *Rugby Chapel*.

"Whom a thirst
 Ardent, unquenchable, fires,
 Not with the crowd to be spent,
 Not without aim to go round,
 In an eddy of purposeless dust,
 Effort unmeaning and vain."¹

But the path of advance to which the select few—the remnant as distinguished from the majority²—thus stand self-committed, is one that leads through dangers and difficulties without number—a "long, steep, journey," indeed! To "strain on" with "frowning foreheads," and "lips sternly compress'd," fighting inch by inch through the darkness and the tempest, often without friend or companion on the perilous road—such is the only way to reach the goal. But what a picture of the higher life of the spirit is thus presented to us! Those who would wish to see the problems and responsibilities of individual existence treated as matters to set little store by—as things of no very serious import, which in certain moods we are apt to overestimate—will not meet in Arnold a poet after their own hearts. He makes no attempt to lighten the burden of life—it is here and we must bear it; all he can offer to do is to show us how to strengthen ourselves, that we may carry it manfully, and

¹ *Rugby Chapel.*

² See the American lecture on *Numbers*.

without childish petulance. That our course of self-discipline must needs be fraught with infinite pain and trial—that it will always be easy for us to fail and difficult to succeed—that every step we take forward and upward will be the result of labors accomplished “with aching hands and bleeding feet”¹—with such declarations does Arnold come to us and strive to rouse us from flippancy, nonchalance, and the careless self-complacency of the average man of the world. How hardly, indeed, shall any of us enter into the Kingdom of God!

And this problem of individual existence, of conduct, becomes all the more arduous and complicated because of the danger of extremes. Most men may accept without protest the “brazen prison” in which their lives are confined, giving all their energies to “some unmeaning task-work” and dying at last “unfreed, having seen nothing, still unblest.” From such stultifying conditions a few impatiently escape; and of such few, some setting forth upon “the wide ocean of life anew” loose their hold of reality altogether, care not how there may prevail

“Despotic on that sea
Trade-winds which cross it from eternity,”

and thus “standing for some false, impossible shore” of aspiration or fancy, make shipwreck

¹ *Morality.*

of themselves, and perish, miserable and un-
availing. Thus the terrible question faces us—

“Is there no life, save these alone?
Madman or slave, must man be one?”¹

Hemmed in on all sides as in this earth “where-
on we dream” by the “high uno’erleap’d
Mountains of Necessity,”² we are sooner or later
made to realize that

“Limits we did not set,
Condition all we do”³—

and that with all our boasted freedom, our
spiritual yearnings, our rhetorical and conven-
tional phraseology, it must ever remain pro-
foundly true that

“To tunes we did not call our being must keep
chime.”⁴

There perchance lies the central crux for
those who scorn to remain contented inmates
of the brazen prison wherein most men pass
their days. We are tethered fast to stern facts,
and the danger is lest we should wear ourselves
out with futile strivings for the impossible.
Our margin of possible endeavor is “narrower

¹ *A Summer Night.*

² *To a Republican Friend: Second Sonnet.*

³ *Empedocles on Etna*, Act I., Scene 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*

. . . than we deem ;”¹ yet by the frank acceptance of our limitations and the careful economy and direction of our powers, we shall be privileged to discover

“ How fair a lot to fill
Is left to each man still.”²

Thus Arnold comes to us with his word of quiet but lofty encouragement :

“ But thou, because thou hear’st
Men scoff at Heaven and Fate,
Because the Gods thou fear’st
Fail to make blest thy state,
Tremblest, and wilt not dare to trust the joys there
are !

“ I say : Fear not ! Life still
Leaves human effort scope,
But since life teems with ill,
Nurse no extravagant hope :
Because thou must not dream, thou need’st not
then despair ! ”³

It is, therefore, in aiding the individual man towards the solution of the doubly-complex problem of his life that the world’s great systems of morality have been of the highest ser-

¹ *To a Republican Friend : Second Sonnet.*

² *A Summer Night.*

³ *Empedocles on Etna, Act i., Scene 2.*

vice. "The object of systems of morality"—thus Arnold himself states the matter, in his essay on Marcus Aurelius—"is to take possession of human life, to save it from being abandoned to passion, or allowed to drift at hazard, to give it happiness by establishing it in the practice of virtue. . . . In its uninspired as well as in its inspired moments, in its days of languor and gloom, as well as in its days of sunshine and energy, human life has thus always a clue to follow, and may always be making way towards its goal."

Of the singularly high quality of Arnold's own ethical teaching, and especially of the moral temper by which that teaching was inspired, it is possible to speak only in terms of the profoundest admiration. The clear sharp ring of the noblest stoical note is heard throughout his verse. Throwing us back everywhere and at all times upon the element of personal character, he raises us above the seemingly fatal influence of chance and circumstance; points within for the ultimate secret of strength and success;¹ and insists that in the performance of duty itself lies our one certain path—not indeed to what the world calls happiness;

¹ See, e. g., *Self-Dependence*, *Religious Isolation*, *Palladium*, and the magnificent chant of Empedocles in *Empedocles on Etna*—one of the noblest pieces of ethical verse to be found in the whole range of English literature, and fully deserving of the praise which Mr. Swinburne has lavished upon it.

to that we can claim no prescriptive right;¹ but to the fine satisfaction which belongs to the feeling of steady manhood, and our sense of superiority to those environing forces which constantly do battle against the soul. In the passage just above quoted, he lays stress, it will be observed, upon life's uninspired moments, upon the days of languor and gloom through which the strongest must necessarily be called upon to pass. Even then, he asserts, we may still have our clue to follow, may still make headway towards our goal. Truly it is characteristic of the writer of these splendid lines that in the mood of the lowest and most abject despair that anywhere finds expression in his poetry, it is to the same final conception of conduct and duty, to the same central thought of the power and responsibility of the individual, that he still returns, secure of finding there the relief and inspiration which the outer world is no longer able to yield. He has sung for us, in *Dover Beach*, of the century's collapse of faith, and of the hopelessness and confusion with which his own mind is filled. Does he, therefore, feel impelled to abandon the conflict of life altogether—to submit him-

¹ " Could'st thou, Pausanias, learn

How deep a fault is this ;

Could'st thou but once discern

Thou hast no right to bliss,

No title from the gods to welfare and repose," etc.

—*Empedocles on Etna*, in the chant just referred to,

self to what seems the stronger force of destiny, and so float down the stream of tendency to "dull oblivion" and "the devouring grave?" On the contrary, it is just then that he feels it most imperatively needful for his higher manhood to declare itself :

"Ah, love, let us be true
 To one another ! for the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain ;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight
 Where ignorant armies clash by night."

Joy and sorrow, light and darkness, belong to the world outside us ; but "'t is in ourselves that we are thus or thus."

And yet high, noble, in every way admirable as Arnold's moral temper and teaching alike are, it is more than doubtful whether they could ever be popularized—ever be made of much service to any save a few out of the world's "complaining millions of men." Arnold himself, as it seems to us, has passed judgment on his own ethical position and outlook in the fine sentences in which he discusses the highly emotionalized utterances of Christian morality with the classic stoicism to which confessedly his intellectual indebtedness was so

great. "The mass of mankind," he writes, "can be carried along a course full of hardship for the natural man, can be borne over the thousand impediments of the narrow way, only by the tide of a joyful and bounding emotion. It is impossible to rise from reading Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius without a sense of constraint and melancholy, without feeling that the burden laid upon man is well-nigh greater than he can bear."¹ And again: "'Lead me, Zeus, and Destiny,' says the prayer of Epictetus, 'whithersoever I am appointed to go; I will follow without wavering; even though I turn coward and shrink, I will have to follow all the same.' The fortitude of that is for the strong, for the few; even for them the spiritual atmosphere with which it surrounds them is bleak and gray. But 'Let thy loving spirit lead me forth into the land of righteousness';—'The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory'; 'Unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings,' says the Old Testament; 'Born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God; 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'; 'Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world.' says the New. The ray of sunshine is there, the glow of a divine warmth;—the austerity of the sage

¹ *Marcus Aurelius* (*Essays*, i., p. 346).

melts away under it, the paralysis of the weak is healed; he who is vivified by it renews his strength; 'all things are possible to him'; 'he is a new creature.'"¹

Now, it is to be feared that in Arnold's poetry "the mass of mankind" can hardly be expected to find the tide of "joyful and bounding emotion," which he tells us is so essential for their welfare and growth. It is impossible to rise from the perusal of his pages without experiencing, as he confessed that he experienced in reading Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius "a sense of constraint and melancholy," a haunting feeling "that the burden laid upon man is well-nigh greater than he can bear." The "ray of sunshine" rarely irradiates his noblest poetry; the "glow of a divine warmth" hardly ever melts "the austerity of the sage." Yet we would not take leave of Arnold with our emphasis upon any of the negative aspects of his work. There are some to-day, there will surely be still more in the future, upon whom his splendid influence must needs make itself felt. To a few at least in each generation, Arnold will seem the ideal teacher—the most helpful, the most beneficent, the most profoundly satisfactory of guides, counsellors, friends. And in an age that is prone to sensationalism, extravagance, wild thinking and wilder acting,—in an age that loves quack

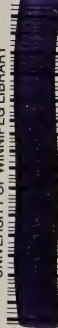
¹ *Marcus Aurelius (Essays, i., p. 347).*

remedies, and is hysterically ready to follow every self-constituted blind leader of the blind—it is something indeed to have had a counter-acting power such as his—so calm and so far-reaching, so evenly-balanced and benign.

THE END.

SEP 28 1970

UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG LIBRARY



3 1888 007 159 818